



MAGYC

Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

The EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities and the Egyptian Migration State

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MAGYC: The MAGYC (**Migr**Ation **G**overnance and **AsYlum C**risis) project seeks to assess how migration governance has responded to the recent “refugee crises” and has since been influenced by it, and how crises at large shape policy responses to migration. This four-year research project (2018–2022) brings together twelve international partners: the Hugo Observatory from the University of Liège (Coordinator), Sciences Po, the University of Economics in Bratislava, the GIGA institute of Global and Area Studies, Lund University, the IDMC, SOAS University of London, the University of Milan, the Lebanese American University, the University of Macedonia, Sabanci University, IfPO/CNRS.

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MAGYC Working Paper

Abstract

The management of cross-border mobility has been a key component of the evolving relationship between Egypt and the European Union that culminated in the 2017 EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities 2017-20. This working paper compares the EU's pre- and post- migration crisis response via a historical and political contextualisation of EU-Egypt relations going back to the 1977 EC-Egypt Cooperation Agreement. It pays particular attention to the transformation and evolution of EU cooperation instruments vis-à-vis Egypt – a pivotal migration state throughout its history. The paper also highlights the complexity of migration flows that the Southern Mediterranean country has managed – from labour emigration and immigration to transit and forced migration. It examines the extent to which these complexities are mirrored in Egyptian migration diplomacy, and how they were linked to other policy goals, including trade and energy. The paper posits that the post-2011 refugee and migration crisis across the Mediterranean has been a driving force behind closer European cooperation with Egypt's military regime and, arguably, will continue to shape the country's relationship with Europe in the years to come.

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Introduction

The EU-Egypt relationship is central in understanding Europe's response to the post-2015 migration 'crisis.' Located in a key position that connects Africa, the Middle East, and Europe via the Mediterranean Sea, Egypt continued to constitute an important country for European powers long after Napoleon, and its key status remains unchanged today in its relationship with the European Union [EU], going back to the 1977 Association Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities [EC] and Egypt. This relationship has withered Egyptian socio-political and economic unrest, varying degrees of autocratic rule, as well as brief experiments with democratization (Pace, 2012). This working paper aims to focus on how the management of the post-2011 migration and refugee crisis across the Mediterranean featured in, and affected, these relations. While cooperation on matters of economics and security is long-standing, EU-Egypt negotiations around matters of cross-border mobility management are more recent and merit closer analysis.

In order to do so, this policy firstly provides the wider context of EU-Egypt relations within which cooperation on matters of migration has occurred, paying particular attention to pre- and post-2015 responses. European powers' engagement with Egypt has undergone a number of shifts throughout the post-1977 period, shaped both by evolving EU priorities as well as Egyptian policymakers' agendas. The paper on focuses on the institutional mechanisms negotiated and enforced in order to tackle the refugee and migration flows, while examining how the evolving EU migration policy may relate to other policy goals. It contextualises these initiatives with a discussion of the Egyptian migration state and the priorities of Egypt's migration diplomacy in the region. This identifies a common thread that runs across Egypt's policies (or, in certain aspects, non-policies) is the instrumentalization of migration, and problematises the extent to which existing EU-Egypt cooperation instruments contribute to the resolution—or perpetuation—of “migration crises.”

Contextualising EU-Egypt Relations

The Arab Republic of Egypt has long constituted a strategic partner of the European Union [EU], be it in times of crisis or otherwise. Currently at 99.4 million inhabitants and with a 2.38% annual population growth rate, Egypt constitutes the most populous country in the Middle East, while accounting for roughly one quarter of the Arab

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world's population (Cammett et al., 2015).¹ Given Egypt's regional importance, it is not surprising that the country has been of vital strategic importance for the European Union going back to the 1977 EC-Egypt Cooperation Agreement, currently constituting one of the primary targets of EU technical and economic assistance in the region (İşleyen, 2015). In fact, Egypt has often attempted to claim a leading role in negotiations between the EU and southern Mediterranean countries (Lazarou et al., 2013), as it 'always claimed for itself the role of the EU's main southern Mediterranean partner' (Comelli, 2010).

It was in the mid-1990s that the EU elaborated a more holistic approach towards the MENA region. In 1995, the Barcelona Declaration inaugurated the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), with the aim building and sustaining a multilateral framework of effective cooperation between the EU and its Mediterranean partners. The distinct promotion of regional integration 'à la EU,' on the basis of the export of the European model was also discernible in the controversial 2008 Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) initiative (Lazarou et al., 2013), although the process of deepening ties with Egypt – as well as with other Arab states – was interrupted by the events of the 'Arab Spring.' In this processes, migration was on the agenda. In fact, in June 2011, Egypt was offered the prospect of opening a Dialogue on Mobility, Migration and Security with the EU, which serves as a precursor to the signing of a Mobility Partnership. However, in September 2011 Egypt declined the offer, with Egyptian policymakers citing political reasons.²

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution caught European policy-makers by surprise, ostensibly at a loss over identifying new, credible political partners in post-revolutionary Egypt: the adopted Action Plan had not been discussed with any non-governmental political actors or civil society organizations; rather, it was the result of negotiations with government officials, who resisted any change to the political status quo and whose impact is evident in the final version of the document (Youngs, 2006). As Laïdi argues (2008), in the case of Egypt, even the limited critiques directed at the government eventually disappeared from the official Action Plan document. Despite a tepid response to the 2011 Revolution, the EU worked hard to support the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the aftermath of the election of Mohamed Morsi in June 2012,

¹ For all relevant information, see the CIA World Factbook on Egypt, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>. For the socio-political repercussions of this see Ibrahim (1982), and Winckler (2009).

² Author Interview, Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Cairo (November 2017).

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primarily around economic cooperation. The development of rural areas and European contributions to the extension of the Cairo Metro, for instance, were combined with €449 million in funds provided under the 2011–13 National Indicative Programme (NIP) for Egypt, coupled with the promise of an additional 90 million as part of the SPRING (Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth) programme under the slogan 'more [help] for more [reforms]' (Pinfari, 2013). In late 2012, the European Investment Bank decided to double its lending to Egypt with up to €1 billion on an annual basis, while the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development similarly increased its lending to the country to €1 billion per annum (Börzel et al., 2017). In 2012, the volume of EU-Egypt trade reached €23.8 billion, up from €11.5 billion in 2004 – the year in which the EU–Egypt Association Agreement (AA) entered into force (Pinfari, 2013). To an extent this has resulted in lengthy negotiations and late adoption of agreements. The initiation of the 2007 EU-Egypt Action Plan, taking place significantly later than that of other Mediterranean countries, is not the exception to the rule: the Euro-Mediterranean AA negotiations between the EU and Egypt lasted for 5 years (1994-1999), took another 20 months for Egypt to initial the agreement (January 2001), and another four months for Cairo to sign it (Del Sarto, 2006). EU officials had signed a Memorandum of Understanding agreement with Egypt in early 2008.

Faced with a rising number of anti-democratic measures adopted by the Morsi government – including the constitutional decree placing him temporarily above judicial supervision – the European Parliament's March 2013 resolution stated that the EU should 'not grant any budgetary support to the Egyptian authorities if no major progress is made regarding respect for human rights and freedoms, democratic governance and the rule of law' (European Parliament, 2013). The European Court of Auditors' June 2013 report similarly argued that 'EU aid has not been effective in improving governance' (European Court of Auditors, 2013). In response, Catherine Ashton argued that the Commission had adopted an attitude of 'strategic patience' towards Egypt, calling on European colleagues to be a 'critical friend [of Egypt] in times that are extremely difficult' (Pinfari, 2013). On 30 June 2013, massive protests against the Muslim Brotherhood were accompanied by a two-day ultimatum by the Egyptian military for Mohamed Morsi to step down. He did not do so and, on 3 July 2013, he was imprisoned together with most of the Muslim Brotherhood leaders. As the military regime cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood over the following weeks,

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General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi became the country's ruler, while Adly Mansour became the interim president (Kirkpatrick, 2013). This created an issue for the European Union, torn between the wish to rid themselves of an unreliable partner – the Muslim Brotherhood – and the need to respect processes of democratisation. As in earlier times, the EU opted for the middle ground, in which officials avoided calling the ousting of Morsi a military “coup” (Rettman, 2013).

By August 2013, the consolidation of the military regime reached its apex via the killing of some 1,000 demonstrators in two locations, the al-Nahda Square and the Rabaa al-Adawiya Square (Fahim & Sheikh, 2013b). Despite the unprecedented level of violence, the EU did not adopt concrete measures at the EU Foreign Affairs Council Meeting that followed, nor was a consensus reached on an arms embargo. That said, a number of voices raised their concern, including the European External Action Service (EEAS), which stated that the EU is ‘not in favour of military interventions’ (Rettman, 2013) – a statement that was echoed by then UK foreign minister William Hague, who noted that this constituted ‘a dangerous precedent ... if one president can be deposed by the military then of course another one can be in the future’ (BBC News, 2013). Meanwhile, then Germany's foreign minister Guido Westerwelle condemned Morsi's ousting as a ‘major setback for democracy in Egypt’ (Pinfari, 2013). The arrest of many senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi's incommunicado detention also attracted substantial criticism and were described by the then Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt as ‘very disturbing’ (Rettman, 2013). The channels of ‘dialogue’ mentioned by European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Fuele and Catherine Ashton in the reply to the European Court of Auditors also proved instrumental: they positioned both Ashton and Leon as key mediators in the negotiations to find a peaceful alternative to the forceful removal of pro-Morsi camps in Cairo negotiations that, as mentioned above, ended in failure. Throughout the summer months, European officials did offer limited support to the Muslim Brotherhood – it bears noting, for instance, that Ashton was the first high-ranking foreign official to visit Morsi in prison (Fahim & Sheikh, 2013a). Yet a “wait-and-see” attitude persisted, while the matter of managing Mediterranean migration waves would become increasingly pressing.

The Egyptian Migration State

With regard to its management of a diverse range of cross-border mobilities, Egypt arguably constitutes a major migration state in the Global South (cf. Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019a; Hollifield, 2004). For a number of historical, geopolitical, and socio-economic reasons, the country has been at the centre of migration flows for much of its history. Ottoman and British rule, Egypt's long educational tradition would attract thousands of Arab and Muslim students that wishes to study at al-Azhar (Matthews & Akrawi, 1949) or, more recently, Cairo University (Reid, 1990). The founding of the American University in Cairo, as well as a range of smaller institutions across Egypt, solidified the country's standing as a major centre for learning in the Middle East (Qubain, 1966). At the same time, Egypt was home to vibrant European communities, primarily Greeks and Italians that left the country following the 1952 Free Officers Revolution (Dalachanis, 2017). A similar fate awaited the country's Jewish community, who also departed from Egypt from the early 1950s onwards (Laskier, 1992). Egypt has been a destination state for low- and medium-skilled migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Sudan, pursuing employment opportunities, frequently informally: until 1995, Sudanese nationals were able to travel and take up residence in Egypt relatively easily (Norman, 2016). More recently, a number of sub-Saharan transit migrants aim to cross through Egypt either to Israel or, more recently, via Alexandria to Southern Europe.

Egypt also constitutes a notable country of emigration, as Egyptians have also traversed much of the Arab world throughout the 19th and early- to mid-20th centuries (Tsourapas, 2016). However, the country is most well-known for the large waves of labour emigration into the oil-producing Arab states. As Egypt liberalised its emigration policy in 1971, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians left for Libya, Iraq, and the Gulf Cooperation Council states (Ibrahim, 1982; Birks et al., 1983). The massive increase in oil prices following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War accentuated oil-producing states' needs for migrant labour, which served as another "pull" factor for Egyptian emigration (cf. Feiler, 2003). As a result, the Egyptian state has been reliant on labour emigration as a socio-political safety valve, as well as a source of valuable migrant remittances, throughout its post-1971 trajectory (Tsourapas, 2019). Beyond regional migration, which the Egyptian state characterises as 'temporary,' Egyptians have also emigrated increasingly to Western countries from the 1970s onwards, forming

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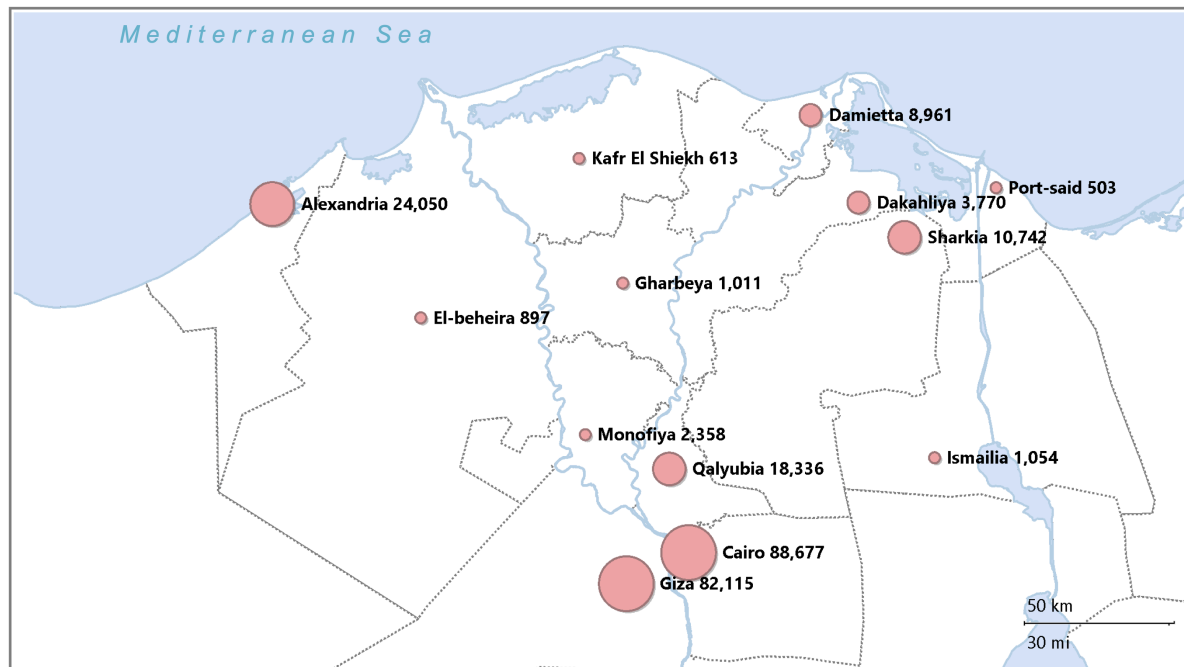
'permanent' diaspora communities across Western Europe and North America (Müller-Funk, 2017; on the multiplicity of Egyptian diasporas, see Tsourapas, 2015). More recently, low-skilled Egyptians are crossing the Mediterranean – frequently in an irregular manner – in order to pursue employment opportunities in Southern European countries (Talani, 2010). As a result, Egyptian communities are now present across Italy and Greece. Egyptian communities in Western countries have been instrumental in the events leading up to, and following, the 2011 Egyptian Revolution (Migration Policy Institute, 2014). Before the return of the military to power in 2013, the Egyptian state joined the small group of Arab states offering out-of-country voting to its citizens residing abroad (Brand, 2014).

Beyond emigration and immigration, Egypt is also faced with a range of transit and forced migration waves. The most populous group is Palestinian refugees, who fled violence following successive Arab-Israeli Wars (El-Abed, 2009). Today, roughly 300,000 Palestinians live in Egypt. Egypt's relations with Israel have affected the government's policy toward Palestinians. In terms of the former, Egyptian–Israeli cooperation has sustained the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip since 2007, once Hamas (an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood) assumed power. Egypt's strict border controls at the border city of Rafah, since 2007, have prevented Palestinians from reaching Gaza for weeks or months on end. Beyond Palestinians, Egypt also had to tackle the inflow of Iraqi refugees following the 2003 US invasion and the 2006 al-Askari Mosque bombing that accentuated violence in the country (Norman, 2017). The vast majority of Iraqis were able to enter the country with a student, tourist, or investment visa that they could acquire from Iraqi travel agencies, with the expectation that they register with Egyptian authorities and, subsequently, with UNHCR, within ten days of arrival. This policy shifted to a more restrictive one in late 2006, as existing visas became more difficult to renew and prospective Iraqi refugees would be required to attend an interview at an Egyptian consulate prior to arrival (effectively forcing them to enter Egypt via Syria or Lebanon). At the same time, Iraqis faced numerous restrictions with regard to access to education or work: Iraqi children were not allowed to attend public primary or secondary schools. Beyond education, those seeking employment needed to secure a work permit from the Ministry of Manpower, which would cost employers £1,000. These work permits were also issued once the applicant proved that the work to be done necessitated special skills and qualifications, so as not to

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compete with the local Egyptian workforce. In practice, this heightened the difficulty in securing work for Iraqi refugees.³

Image – Number and Location of Registered Syrian Refugees in Egypt (February 2019)



Source: UNHCR (2019)

Finally, Egypt is also home to a sizeable Syrian refugee community (see Image). In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 “Arab Spring” events and start of the Syrian civil war, the Muslim Brotherhood-led government in Egypt welcomed Syrians, who were made exempt from entry visas and allowed to enter on three-month tourist visas and register with UNHCR. Once the military resumed power in mid-2013, Egypt toughened its stance, requiring Syrians to obtain a visa prior to arrival and register with the government once their visa expired. As of April 2018, nearly 130,000 registered Syrians lived in Egypt, though the government estimates that the total number is 300,000. The exact size of Egypt’s refugee population remains unclear (for an overview, see Tsourapas, 2018a).

³ Author Interview, Anonymous; Cairo (November 2017).

The EU Partnership Priorities

The complexity of cross-border mobility into, out of, and through Egypt has arguably made migration a key component of EU-Egypt relations and a pressing matter in the cooperation agenda. In terms of migration, the relations has historically been governed through the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility [GAMM] (European Commission, 2016a), which has been in place since 2005. This complements frameworks that are tasked with implementing the GAMM – namely, the European Neighborhood Policy [ENP] (European Commission, 2016b), and the two processes that the EU uses to collaborate on migration-specific issues with specific non-European countries: the 2006 Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (Rabat Process) (IOM, 2015) and the 2013 EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (Khartoum Process) (IOM, 2016). In addition to this, the European Commission launched the formal EU-Egypt dialogue on migration (European Parliament, 2019), established in March 2017,

As mentioned earlier, despite the existence of a wide variety of cooperation processes, the 2011 Egyptian Revolution caught European policymakers by surprise. With the possible exception of the January 2014 launch of “Shaping Egypt’s Association to the European Research Area and Cooperation Action Plus,” little occurred in terms of EU-Egypt relations in 2013 and early 2014. This ambivalence continued following the Egyptian Presidential elections of May 2014. The EU observation mission mentioned that these elections were ‘free but not always very fair’ (Kirkpatrick, 2014), while the EU did not prioritise the regime’s crackdown on dissent, instead taking ‘good note of the overall peaceful and orderly conduct of the elections’ (quoted in Viceré & Fabbrini, 2017). Achraimer argues that this was due to evolving geopolitics in the broader region:

‘Most European policymakers saw no alternative to coming to terms with the new rulers, not least due to worrisome developments in the rest of the region around that time. The situation in Syria was getting increasingly complex, with the Assad regime and Daesh being strengthened simultaneously. Elections in Libya had sharpened the Islamist-secularist divide and, effectively, resulted in two parliaments and governments. In Yemen, the conflict between the government and Houthi rebels began to escalate. Hence, the EU wanted to prevent turmoil in Egypt by all means and hoped that a strong Egyptian government could play a constructive role in solving regional conflicts’ (Achraimer, 2020, p. 496).

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After all, particularly given the rise of irregular migration flows across the Mediterranean, Egypt was becoming a powerful ally: 'European countries with concerns that a rise in instability in the Arab world could lead to a sharp increase in the levels of illegal migration are very keen to support the stability of Egypt – even at the expense of Western democratic values' (Ezzat, 2014). In recognition of this, a National Committee on Countering Trafficking in Persons was created, under the Ministry of Justice while Ambassador Naela Gabr was appointed as Chairperson of the National Committee on Combatting and Preventing Illegal Migration – both measures serving as a signal that Egyptians' wished to co-operate formally on irregular migration with the EU.⁴ Europe continued building bridges – albeit modestly – with the new status quo actors in Egypt, as al-Sisi paid official visits to Italy and France, in an effort 'to restore Egypt's standing' (Egypt Independent, 2014). At the same time, Egypt was involved in a major rapprochement with non-Western actors, including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Achrainer, 2020). To European policymakers, the fate of the military regime appeared stronger by the day.

In this context, a growing *rapprochement* between EU and the new Egyptian regime occurred, not unexpectedly including matters of mobility. On the Egyptian side, despite the growing consolidation of the military regime, its socio-economic foundations remained perilous. On the European side, there was a growing need to recruit Egyptian help in taming the rise of irregular migration and refugee flows across the Mediterranean. In May 2015, EU Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs Dimitris Avramopoulos visited Cairo in order to strengthen relations on these issues (European Commission, 2015). In its migration diplomacy, the Egyptian regime stressed its importance vis-à-vis the regulation of irregular migration towards Europe (cf. Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019). As Egyptian Ambassador Naela Garb reported in 2016,

International support might not be enough to help ease the burden several countries bear to accommodate the growing number of migrants. We stand ready to enhance our engagement with international donors and financial institutions to mobilize additional resources for developmental projects with immediate bearing on youth susceptible to illegal migration in Egypt and elsewhere (Gabr, 2016).

⁴ Author Interview, Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Cairo (November 2017).

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At the same time, specific deals were signed with Siemens, the German company that agreed to supply gas and wind power plants to Egypt for €8 billion in January 2015, while Egypt has been a traditional buyer of European – particularly French – weapons (Reuters, 2015). The Italian company Eni also announced, in August 2015, the largest discovery of gas in the Mediterranean, the Zohr Gas Field, located inside the Egyptian offshore (Achraimer, 2020). As economic linkages intensified, the Egyptian regime continued to crack down on political dissent, further damaging its human rights record (Human Rights Watch, 2019; U.S. Embassy in Egypt, 2017). Yet, European discourse remained on the need to improve relations, signalling a deepening of cooperation. President of the European Council Donald Tusk visited Cairo in September 2015. High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini followed with a trip in November, in which she declared that '... it was very important for me to pay an official visit to Cairo to revitalize ... relations,' stressing that 'within intense work we are going to restart on all the different levels of our cooperation' (EEAS, 2015). Following the agreement on a €68 million grant to Egypt the following day, Mogherini argued that 'I really wish this can be the beginning [...] of a long and strong partnership, friendship and the first one of many agreements we can sign in the future' (European External Action Service, 2016).

By June 2016, when the EU published its Global Strategy, there was an acknowledged shift towards 'state and societal resilience [as] our strategic priority in the neighbourhood' (quoted in Schumacher et al., 2017), arguably in order to enable Egypt to overcome political or socio-economic crises without threatening social stability or state legitimacy. Isolated voices of dissent continued to exist – the murder of Italian PhD student Giulio Regeni, for instance, who had disappeared on 25 January and found in March 2016 – created ongoing tensions, particularly as the EP continued to press on this issue (Kirchgaessner, 2016). But the institutionalization of the EU's relations with Egypt persisted, particularly given fears that irregular migration through North Africa would increase in the aftermath of the March 2016 EU-Turkey Deal.⁵ In fact, a number of EU officials – including former EP President Martin Schulz – argued for a similar type of agreement with Egypt (Achraimer, 2020, p. 505). As such, mutual visits increased in frequency throughout the post-2016 period.

⁵ Author Interview, Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Cairo (November 2017).

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The seventh EU-Egypt Association Council meeting, which occurred in Brussels on 25 July 2017, culminated in the signing of the EU-Egypt partnership priorities for 2017-2020, setting the framework for enhanced dialogue and cooperation and aiming to 'fully [embed] migration on our overall relations and existing frameworks such as ENP, Khartoum [Process] and Valetta [Summit]' (European Council, 2017). At the moment of writing in early 2020, relations between Europe and Egypt appear particularly close, as cooperation deepens across three different issues, according to the revised ENP and to Egypt's Vision 2030 document: economic and social development, foreign policy, and enhancing stability (Arab Republic of Egypt, 2015). In terms of the first, relations focus on supporting investment, enhancing the private sector, strengthening energy synergies, and fully implementing the 2004 free trade agreement, as per EU core interests. In terms of foreign policy, the two sides have agreed to coordinate policymaking in terms of crisis management and humanitarian assistance. Finally, despite some vagueness in the area of stability, the two sides pledged attention to improving the capacity of institutions, empowering local authorities, and tackling corruption. It appears, at least on paper, that any obstacles to rapprochement have now perished, as the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities aimed to shape regional migration governance.

Egyptian Migration Diplomacy and the EU in the post-2013 Era

How does the EU-Egypt Partnership fit into the broader framework of managing cross-border mobility in the region? One way to approach this would be through a migration diplomacy framework, namely 'states' use of diplomatic tools, processes, and procedures to manage cross-border population mobility' (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019b; cf. Thiollet, 2011). Two notable facets of Egyptian migration diplomacy are arguably able to nuance our understanding of the EU-Egypt Partnership agreement and the management of the migration and refugee 'crisis' in the Mediterranean. First, Egypt follows a pattern seen in other MENA countries, having developed unclear immigration and refugee policies.⁶ The legal and institutional framework governing migration management in Egypt, as in other countries of the Middle East, is sufficiently vague to grant state actors significant leeway in their approach to migration management. The country's "strategic ambivalence" toward these issues, to borrow

⁶ Author Interview, International Organization for Migration; Cairo (November 2017).

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Kelsey Norman's term (Norman, 2017), allows the proliferation of informal practices that override formal regulations: For instance, refugees can gain employment across Egypt's large informal sectors, yet these practices are not sanctioned or protected by government regulations, thereby further exacerbating these communities' precarious position.⁷ At the same time, this ambivalence hinders efficient approaches to multilateral migration management given that it hinders the possibility of relying on solid data with regard to migration stock and flows. The informality of migration management and the lack of transparent mobility measurement mechanisms has been a common trope in Egyptian migration history with a distinct political rationale (Tsourapas, 2015). In the context of the post-2011 migration and refugee "crisis," it has the potential of undermining the success of cooperation initiatives.

This ambivalence has been one of the areas of focus in terms of the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities agreement, particularly with regard to its bureaucratic and economic rationality (cf. Fine 2019). Bureaucratic rationality 'presents the migrant crisis in terms of respect for law and order. Thus, migrant flows are to be reduced by the strict application of law separating the "legal" from the "illegal" migrant.' The EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities approached this matter primarily with regard to state capacity, and highlighted that:

'The political declaration of the Valletta Summit and the Joint Valletta Action Plan will provide the main context for cooperation between the EU and Egypt in the field of migration. The EU will support the Egyptian government's efforts to strengthen its migration governance framework, including elements of legislative reform and strategies for migration management. The EU will support Egypt's efforts to prevent and combat irregular migration, trafficking and smuggling of human beings, including identifying and assisting victims of trafficking. It will also seek to support and strengthen Egyptian capacity to protect migrants' rights and to provide protection to those who qualify for it, in line with international standards. The EU and Egypt will explore cooperation on the voluntary return of irregular migrants to their country of origin to ensure that migration is globally managed in a legal manner. This will go hand in hand with cooperation in addressing root causes of irregular migration, in particular underdevelopment, poverty and unemployment.

Beyond a bureaucratic rationale, the aim of building state capacity is also linked to development. As MAGYC researchers have argued elsewhere, migration governance in crisis assumes a distinct economic rationality, namely 'the root causes narrative - is premised on the idea that most migration to Europe is driven by

⁷ Author Interview, Anonymous; Cairo (November 2017).

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economic motivations and consequentially more economic opportunities in countries of origin will lead to less migration.' In the case of Egypt, this was centered on the EU's decision to create the 'Emergency Trust Fund for Africa,' made at the November 2015 Valetta Summit on Migration.⁸ The resources there are meant for 'the creation of jobs and economic development, basic services for local populations, stability and governance, and migration management' – namely, preventing irregular migration and enhancing capacity to combat human trafficking. As the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities highlight, 'Egypt's Sustainable Modern Economy and Social Development' constitute a key goal, considering 'the EU and Egypt as key partners will cooperate in advancing socioeconomic goals set out in Egypt's 'Sustainable Development Strategy — Vision 2030' with a view to building a stable and prosperous Egypt.' In particular, this included

'measures that can generate a larger fiscal space to better implement its sustainable development strategy, further reform of subsidies and taxation, strengthening the role of the private sector and enhancing the business climate to attract more foreign investment, including through a more open and competitive trade policy, fully benefit from the digital dividend and through support to key infrastructure projects such as the development of an efficient transport system. Furthermore, the EU will support Egypt's efforts towards public administration reform and good governance, including through the use of high quality statistics and taking into account the digital revolution and the related new business and societal models.'

Beyond Egypt's 'strategic ambivalence,' a second important dimension of its migration diplomacy refers to decision-making processes: despite the plethora of structures set up to manage migration, policymaking frequently takes place in the highest echelons of the executive branch, rather than within transparent bureaucratic mechanisms, the legislature, or other institutionalized processes.⁹ Various migration crises – such as Jordan's deportation of hundreds of Egyptian workers in 2012, for instance, ceased following a phone call by the Egyptian President to the Jordanian monarch (Tsourapas, 2018b). The content of numerous labour migration treaties (primarily with GCC countries) is never made public. As numerous researchers have highlighted, the Egyptian regime approaches migration in security terms, further highlighting a lack of administrative transparency or any substantive engagement with NGOs or civil society actors.

⁸ Author Interview, Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Cairo (November 2017).

⁹ Author Interview, International Organization for Migration; Cairo (November 2017).

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The EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities also aimed to take this dimension of Egyptian migration diplomacy into account, at least nominally. As we have highlighted elsewhere, a political rationality 'presents the migration crisis as necessitating the assurance of absolute sovereignty and has led to a retreat from Europeanisation' (Fine 2019). This implies that 'any "cooperation" ... for governing migration should be limited [which] contributes to the shaping of the definition of governing solutions - in this case the quest to avoid multilateral entanglement.' These elements were firmly at place into the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities, which were agreed on 25 July 2017. The document set out the 'principles of cooperation,' arguing that 'the EU and Egypt will step up cooperation and consultations and will exchange experience in crisis management and prevention,' as the two seek 'to address the complex challenges to peace, stability and development arising from conflict and natural disasters, in their common neighborhood and beyond.' In particular, the EU and Egypt agreed that:

Issues of common interest should also be tackled through a stronger regional and sub-regional (South-South) cooperation. In this respect, the EU and Egypt will work together [while] the EU and Egypt agree that civil society is an important and potent contributor to the implementation of their partnership priorities and to transparent, participatory governance and can support the sustainable development process underway in Egypt. They will work with civil society in contributing effectively in the economic, political and social development process in compliance with the Egyptian Constitution and the respective national legislation.

What might Egyptian practices of migration diplomacy and the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities indicate about cross-border mobility management across the Mediterranean? This policy report has highlighted that European actors understand the significant degree of interdependence in the relationship between Europe and North Africa (cf. Tsourapas 2018), which directly affects EU strategies. At the same time, a historical look at the evolving EU-Egypt relations highlights that political stability and regional cooperation in the 'Med region' continues to be a key EU interest, even if this comes at the expense of transparency or democratization. Trade relations, oil and gas supplies, security concerns, as well as migration management are all areas in which the EU is linked to its Neighbourhood. While Egypt traditionally constituted an important partner in the Southern Mediterranean, regional instability and a rise in irregular migration across the Mediterranean to Europe have raised the strategic value of Egypt in the eyes of the European Union. Since 2015, security and migration management have been key issues in the European Neighbourhood Policy toward Egypt and other MENA countries.

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Not unlike other countries south of the Mediterranean, Egypt sees this as an opportunity for increased foreign aid and employment opportunities.¹⁰ These opportunities appear either within the broader EU cooperative framework, as outlined in this paper: European leaders, fresh from the March 2016 EU-Turkey agreement that stemmed irregular migration flows into Southern Europe, have been keen to export this model to North Africa. Overall, the examination of Egyptian migration policy points to the sheer complexity that exists in the management of diverse forms of mobility across the Global South. Foreign policy pressures interact with domestic economic needs within a shifting geopolitical context, where legacies of the past continue playing an important role. A common thread that runs across Egypt's policies (or, in certain aspects, non-policies) is the instrumentalization of migration in its cooperation framework with European partners. The extent to which such approaches contribute to the resolution—or perpetuation—of “migration crises” is open to debate.

Conclusion

This policy paper has examined the evolving nature of the EU-Egypt relationship from 1977 EC-Egypt Cooperation Agreement to the present day, with a particular focus on cross-border mobility management. It has highlighted the importance of Egypt as a regional actor in terms of EU foreign policy priorities, which has been underlined by the multiplicity of agreements and institutional frameworks that have proliferated over the past few decades. Although the 2011 events and the country's subsequent experiment with democratization caught Europeans by surprise, EU-Egypt relations resumed close a trajectory of closer cooperation – aided no doubt by the rising security and humanitarian issue of irregular migration across the Mediterranean – that culminated in the signing of the 2017 EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities.

A closer look at the EU-Egypt agreement, in light of the specific characteristics of Egyptian migration diplomacy strategies, highlights an attempt to address a number of particularities – namely, the informality or ambivalence that traditionally characterizes the Egyptian state's approach to the management of cross-border mobility as well as the insistence of managing migration at the highest level of the executive in a rather opaque way. Yet, in light of traditional European hesitation to

¹⁰ Author Interview, International Organization of Migration Middle East; Cairo (November 2017).

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jeopardize any cooperation potential by insisting on structural changes within Egypt, the extent to which the Partnership Priorities agreement can produce a meaningful shift in multilateral cooperation on migration management in the Mediterranean is dubious.

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