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Beyond Unilateral Securitization

What Civil Society Actors Want from Migration, Asylum and Mobility Policies in the Mediterranean

Emanuela Roman

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Abstract

This paper analyses how stakeholders in southern and eastern Mediterranean countries evaluate the EU's role, approach and policies in the field of migration, mobility and asylum, focusing on the policy instruments it has adopted, the actors involved (or not involved) in policy-making, and the substance of implemented policies. Based on extensive in-depth interviews conducted with a wide range of stakeholders – including in particular different types of civil society actors – in Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey and Europe, the analysis shows that the EU's discourse is informed by two dominant frames – unilateralism and securitization – which translate into Eurocentric, securitizing and conditionality-based policies. The analysis demonstrates also that female migration is underrepresented and misrepresented in both EU and SEM discourses, which translates into the lack of an overall strategy to mainstream gender in migration policy-making. Based on this assessment, the paper presents a series of policy recommendations that have emerged directly from interviewed stakeholders in SEM countries. The fact that these recommendations are grounded on solid and credible empirical bases makes them particularly relevant and authoritative vis-à-vis European interlocutors.

Introduction

Migration, asylum and mobility represent an increasingly contentious field of governance in Euro-Mediterranean relations. In the Mediterranean area, cooperation in this policy field has long been characterized by fundamental divergences of views, interests and approaches, not only between the two shores of the Mediterranean, or between (predominantly) sending, transit and receiving countries, but also among institutional and civil society actors on each side of the Mediterranean. In the framework of the MEDRESET project, Work Package 7 (WP7) aims to develop a deeper knowledge and awareness of the diverse frames, perceptions and priorities of different stakeholders with regard to migration in the Mediterranean space.

As a first step, WP7 investigated the perspectives of local stakeholders in four southern and eastern Mediterranean (SEM) countries – Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey – focusing in particular on those actors who are generally excluded from Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and decision-making – e.g., civil society and grassroots organizations. As a second step, moving

from an increased knowledge of how civil society actors in SEM countries frame migration and evaluate EU policies in this field, WP7 focused on the viewpoint of European stakeholders involved in migration policy-making or working in the area of migration and asylum. By comparing and contrasting the views of both civil society and institutional stakeholders in Europe and in four SEM countries, WP7 examined overlaps and differences in the understanding and evaluation of EU migration cooperation policies in the Mediterranean. As a third and final step, building upon the outcomes of this empirical-based research, WP7 aims to formulate a set of policy recommendations that reflect the perspective of civil society and grassroots organizations in SEM countries, with the purpose of improving and innovating the governance of migration in the Mediterranean. These policy recommendations are gathered in the present paper.

This policy paper largely draws upon the four WP7 country reports (Chaaban et al. 2018, Harrami and Mouna 2018, Okyay 2018, Roman and Pastore 2018a) and the European stakeholders report (Roman 2018). These five reports are based on first-hand information gathered through two different rounds of semi-structured interviews with a variety of stakeholders on both sides of the Mediterranean, consistently with the innovative methodology of recursive multi-stakeholder consultations adopted by the MEDRESET project.

In the framework of WP7, a total of 125 interviews were conducted with 137 stakeholders – 119 interviewees were involved in Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey in two different rounds, and 18 in Europe in one round. Among interviewees there were 78 men and 59 women. The men/women ratio varied significantly in different SEM countries. In Tunisia and Morocco we had the least gender-balanced sample (22 men and 9 women in Tunisia; 23 men and 4 women in Morocco); conversely, in Turkey the sample was more balanced (18 men and 19 women) and in Lebanon we interviewed more women than men (15 vs. 9). However, this difference between Maghreb and Middle East countries may also be linked to the fact that interviews conducted in Turkey and Lebanon involved almost exclusively civil society actors and did not include governmental actors (except for two Lebanese representatives of the national government). The large majority of female interviewees in the four SEM countries work in international or local NGOs or are members of CSOs; the composition of our sample thus reflects the difficulties women face in order to get a position within public institutions. This applies not only to SEM countries, but also to Europe; here we interviewed more women than men (12 vs. 6) but while almost all women (except for two) belonged to the civil society actors category, the majority of men were representatives of EU institutions (see Table 1).

A final consideration regards the representativeness of our sample, and more specifically the representativeness of the SEM civil society stakeholders we interviewed. Our sample cannot be deemed to include in an exhaustive way the entire spectrum of SEM CSOs. Our purpose was to include the organizations that are most actively engaged and involved in the area of migration and asylum; however, we admit we might have left some CSOs out of the picture, especially smaller and less visible grassroots organizations (see also Section 2.2 below). For instance, in Tunisia we have not involved any Islamist CSOs; but this is also due to the fact that Islamist organizations do not have migration-related issues among their priorities, compared to other human rights advocacy CSOs.

Table 1 | Number and gender composition of interviewees in the first and second interview rounds

	First round		Second round		Sum
	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Tunisia	19	5	3	4	31 (in 29 interviews)
Morocco	17	2	6	2	27
Lebanon	6	12	3	3	24 (in 22 interviews)
Turkey	14	16	4	3	37 (in 29 interviews)
Europe	/	/	6	12	18
Sum	56	35	22	24	137 (in 125 interviews)

1. Conceptualization of the Mediterranean

Interviews conducted in the four SEM countries indicated in a quite homogeneous way that, when framing migration-related issues, South-Med stakeholders do not conceive the "Mediterranean space" as it is conceived in the European mainstream discourse. A concept of the Mediterranean as a single, unified space encompassing European, North African and Middle East countries does not seem to exist. SEM interviewees do not consider their home countries as part of a unified "Mediterranean space"; rather, the stakeholders' narratives disclosed a concept of the Mediterranean that is very much linked to Europe.

In the interviews conducted in Tunisia and Turkey in particular, the Mediterranean emerged as the space between the country (Tunisia or Turkey) and Europe, where "Europe" is often not intended as the EU-27, but as southern Europe, or as one or more southern European countries specifically (thus, with a focus on receiving countries in the Mediterranean). This obliteration of the Mediterranean as a single and common space and its reduction to the space between Europe and a given SEM country has produced a multiplicity of "bilateral Mediterraneans", which, in terms of policies, translates into the "bilateralization" of cross-Mediterranean relations. This applies not only to cooperation in the area of migration and asylum, but to other policy areas as well.

In fact, interviewed EU representatives also confirmed the shift from a multilateral to a purely bilateral approach in the EU's relations with its southern neighbours; this has led to an increasing fragmentation of the non-EU political space. Some civil society actors in SEM countries criticized this lack of regional cooperation, stressing that, while venues for dialogue among CSOs in the region have actually been established, South–South inter-governmental cooperation is completely missing, especially when it comes to migration issues.

In Tunisia in particular, civil society actors criticized the governments of South-Med countries for considering their relations with the EU and cooperation policies in the area of migration in a purely bilateral perspective, and for refraining from joining forces and engaging in strategic alliances vis-à-vis the EU. On the one hand, SEM countries tend to accept and uncritically perpetuate the European framing of cross-Mediterranean relations as purely one-to-one (following the model of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy); on the other hand, each SEM country

perceives its general situation and its national interests as individual, particular and often in conflict or competition with those of its neighbours.

In the absence of a macro-regional vision, the Mediterranean is condemned to be an arena for control and risk-reduction policies rather than a space of opportunities, not only in the field of migration but also in other policy fields. Civil society stakeholders, in Morocco and Tunisia in particular, emphasized that the Mediterranean used to be an open space, where people and goods circulated freely. These positive visions of the Mediterranean are contrasted with the fractures generated by restrictive border and migration policies, which are framed as an imposition of European countries. As highlighted by a Tunisian interviewee:

> The Mediterranean is in its essence an open space; across history it has always been a space of travel, trades, exchange and war, from the Greeks, to the Romans, the Egyptians, the Punic people and the Turks; nowadays borders have been created and European countries have tried to transform it into a closed space. (Roman and Pastore 2018a: 7)

2. Evaluation of the EU's Policies and Role in the Field of Migration, Mobility and Asylum

The research conducted has clearly highlighted that at the present moment in the field of migration there are two separate policy agendas in the Mediterranean: one in the Maghreb and one in the Middle East. As exemplified by our case studies, while the Maghreb agenda is more differentiated and comprehensive, the Middle East agenda is currently focused on one predominant issue, while limited consideration is given to other topics.

Similarities in the way the migration profile of Morocco and Tunisia has evolved (transforming them from countries of emigration only, to countries of transit and – increasingly – countries of destination) are reflected in the complexification of the migration policy agendas of both countries. Both count three macro issues: (i) emigration of their own nationals to Europe (which remains a primary concern, especially in Tunisia), including the problem of *harraga*[2] and the lack of legal migration and short-term mobility opportunities; (ii) immigration of sub-Saharan migrants, including issues relating to the existing national legal and policy framework on immigration (criminalization of irregular migration; regularization policy; expulsion practices; poor rights protection; poor integration; discrimination and racism); and (iii) presence of refugees and challenges posed by the lack of a national framework on asylum (although the salience of this issue is comparatively limited, and has been high only in Tunisia in 2011).

Conversely, both Lebanon and Turkey have been affected by the consequences of the civil war in Syria, especially in terms of the refugee flow it generated. Consequently, the migration policy agendas of both countries are pre-eminently focused on this major issue. In both countries other migration-related issues, such as Turkish emigration to Europe, irregular immigration in Turkey, or labour exploitation of migrant workers in Lebanon (especially female

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2   The term *harraga* (from Arabic) means "those who burn (the borders)" and refers to North African migrants who try to enter Europe using irregular means, typically crossing the Mediterranean by boat.

domestic workers), have been de-prioritized. This duality in migration policy agendas is a crucial element to be taken into account when evaluating the EU's approach and policies in the field of migration in the Mediterranean area.

As concerns female migration, this can be considered as a "non-issue" in the migration policy agenda of all the SEM countries researched, as it was almost completely neglected by both institutional and civil society actors, with only a few exceptions among feminist scholars and representatives of women's associations. The fact that female migration is not thematized as an issue is reflected in the lack of gender-specific migration policies, as explained in Section 3 below.

The evaluation of the EU's policies carried out in this section is structured around the three-dimensional analytical framework of the MEDRESET project – focusing on instruments, actors and substance (Huber and Paciello 2016).

2.1 INSTRUMENTS

SEM stakeholders highlighted the pros and cons of the main policy instruments adopted by the EU to implement its migration policies in the Mediterranean. A clear division in the dominant frames emerged between eastern and southern Mediterranean civil society actors. Stakeholders in Lebanon and Turkey focused mainly on the limits of EU-funded projects and EU funding mechanisms, while the main concern of stakeholders in Morocco and Tunisia was how European migration policy instruments, and especially Mobility Partnerships (MPs), are affected by the EU's securitizing approach.

LIMITED EFFECTIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF EU-FUNDED PROJECTS
Stakeholders in Lebanon and Turkey highlighted shortcomings in the management and implementation of EU-funded projects, focusing specifically on refugee-related projects (and as concerns Turkey, on the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey established in 2016). They observed problems relating to inefficient use of resources, overlapping of projects and over-emphasis on certain contexts and target populations. These are mainly due to: (i) the EU's insufficient knowledge of local needs and poor understanding of the local context and political-institutional dynamics; (ii) insufficient engagement with and involvement of local stakeholders (especially locally embedded grassroots actors) in project design and funding allocation; and (iii) lack of coordination with other actors involved as funders or implementers (other international donors, IOs, national governments, NGOs, etc.).

According to local actors, EU projects lack sustainability, as funds are discontinuous and their allocation is not based on a long-term strategic perspective. Along with poor project design, local stakeholders pointed at mismanagement of funds and insufficient monitoring and assessment mechanisms. Criticism was raised also against the uneven distribution of funds, both in geographical and sectoral terms, as well as against refugee-exclusive assistance. Given that host societies in Lebanon and Turkey are facing socio-economic difficulties, in order to avoid feeding feelings of resentment, support initiatives should systematically target the broader local community (especially in socio-economically disadvantaged regions). Some Turkish CSOs noted that a large majority of refugee support projects are focused on Syrian refugees only, leading to an overall discrimination between people in need of protection. For their part, Lebanese CSOs stressed that EU-funded projects in Lebanon focus on refugees

rather than domestic migrant workers because migrant workers' issues, unlike refugees' issues, do not have consequences for Europe; in their view, this is revealing of the fact that EU policies are much more concerned with keeping refugees outside Europe than with protecting migrant rights.

Civil society actors in both countries lamented that a large share of EU funds is allocated to European or international NGOs operating in Lebanon or Turkey, rather than to local CSOs. Indeed, only a limited number of local CSOs – in general those having previous experience in EU projects and an international profile – manage to get involved in European projects, while smaller grassroots CSOs continue to be largely excluded from EU funding, despite their embeddedness in local contexts (see Section 2.2 below). In addition, EU projects tend to hire foreign consultants rather than local experts, although the latter may have a stronger knowledge of the national and local context.

Impact of the EU's security-oriented approach on specific policy instruments and funding mechanisms

Civil society stakeholders in SEM countries and in Europe agreed that, in the framework of the EU external migration policy, the policy instruments and initiatives that have been adopted so far, or that are currently under negotiation (including Mobility Partnerships, European readmission agreements, Visa Facilitation Agreements, the EU–Turkey Statement, etc.) are mainly focused on irregular migration, border control and effective returns. Measures in the fields of legal migration, short-term mobility and development are made conditional to cooperation in stemming migration flows. Such instruments, which are clearly informed by a security-oriented approach, are seen as bringing only short-sighted, partial and temporary solutions, because in practice they do not (sufficiently) broaden regular ways of reaching Europe.

Even the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey and the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (established in the framework of the European Agenda on Migration) are deemed to be negatively affected by the EU's predominant securitizing approach. According to several civil society actors, these two funding mechanisms are not bad instruments as such; if they were not biased by a Eurocentric security-oriented approach, they could actually produce positive outcomes in the third countries concerned. However, the way funds have been allocated so far under these two instruments shows that the EU's securitizing discourse affects also EU project financing (Roman 2018: 9–10).

These considerations apply also to Mobility Partnerships, a policy instrument that the EU proposed to selected SEM countries (including Morocco and Tunisia) after the Arab Spring, as a new form of partnership-based cooperation in the field of migration and asylum. Moroccan and Tunisian civil society stakeholders expressed very similar views with regard to the MPs. These are seen as useful instruments for policy dialogue, interinstitutional coordination and information exchange, but so far they have brought only limited tangible benefits to South-Med countries, especially in terms of mobility and labour migration opportunities. As noted by an EU institutional actor, "what partner countries are really interested in obtaining, labour migration opportunities, is really not at the core of Mobility Partnerships" (Roman 2018: 9). Therefore, even though MPs would potentially be able to reflect and combine the priorities of SEM countries with priorities of European countries, in practice they end up replicating a Eurocentric security-oriented logic and being managed unilaterally by the EU and its MSs.

Despite this, Tunisian and Moroccan CSOs shared a more positive assessment of MPs, compared to other EU policy instruments (e.g., EURAs and VFAs). As reported by Moroccan CSOs, in the framework of the MP, the EU has financed several programmes aimed at facilitating the settling of migrants in Morocco and at improving the protection of migrant rights in the country, including projects targeting migrant women specifically (Harrami and Mouna 2018: 18–19). Moreover, MPs have also contributed to strengthening the role of local civil society actors both in Morocco (where the MP has financed projects for CSO empowerment) and in Tunisia (where CSOs have obtained an active involvement in monitoring the implementation of the MP as part of the Steering Committee).

2.2 Actors

SEM stakeholders evaluated the role played by several actors directly or indirectly involved in migration policy-making and implementation of migration policies in the Mediterranean area, including the EU and its MSs, SEM governmental actors and local CSOs. They focused in particular on the potential for a more active involvement of local CSOs in the governance of migration in SEM countries.

The European Union and its Member States: Key actors, inconsistent policies

SEM stakeholders tended to identify the EU and European countries as the key actors in the migration policy field in the Mediterranean, whereas the role played by other state actors (including global, regional and emerging powers) was barely mentioned. Both European and SEM stakeholders specified that external actors other than the EU (e.g., the USA, Canada, the Gulf Countries, China) either play only a secondary role in the field of migration (e.g., through recruitment programmes for highly skilled workers, particularly significant for Egypt and Lebanon, less so for Maghreb countries), or do play a role in the Mediterranean, but in different policy fields (e.g., trade, energy, infrastructures) that are not directly related to migration (Roman 2018: 14–15).

Despite its key role, the EU was criticized for sometimes being a contradictory and inconsistent interlocutor. According to SEM stakeholders, this is due to structural problems relating to the EU institutional framework, resulting in a lack of coordination among different EU institutions, as well as among different departments within the same institution (as in the case of different DGs within the European Commission), and among different Member States. This fragmented perception of the EU was confirmed also by a European civil society actor: "The problem of any EU policy in the area of migration is that the EU does not speak with one voice only; within the EU there are lots of voices, which correspond to different EU institutions, and to different Member States" (Roman 2018: 13).

With regard to relations between the EU and its MSs, civil society stakeholders highlighted the existence of tensions between the European and national levels of policy-making, in particular as concerns asylum, readmission and legal migration policies. Lebanese stakeholders observed that even though the EU has a common European asylum system, when faced with a perceived migratory "emergency", MSs tend to apply inconsistent (or even conflicting) policies, as in the case of the 2015 refugee crisis, when some EU MSs adopted welcoming policies, while others closed their borders. In their view, the main factor causing such divergent policies is internal politics.

In the field of legal migration, EU officials emphasized the need for a shared approach and more coordination among MSs (Roman 2018: 7–8); but despite the efforts, it is difficult for the European Commission to achieve concrete results in this field, because what is missing is a concrete follow-up by the MSs, which have exclusive competence on national policies concerning the admission of migrants. With regard to cooperation in the field of readmission, as stated by a Tunisian governmental actor, "readmission works much better at the bilateral level than at the EU level" (Roman and Pastore 2018a: 21). In fact, if on the one hand Tunisia is not keen to conclude a readmission agreement with the EU, on the other hand it has signed bilateral readmission agreements with several European countries, and based on these agreements returns of Tunisian nationals are regularly carried out.

National and local governmental actors in SEM countries: Poor institutional coordination, poor governance capacity

When evaluating EU migration policies in the Mediterranean, SEM stakeholders did not focus only on the role of the EU, but also that of their own governmental authorities. National governments were generally blamed for the lack of policies and/or ineffectiveness of existing policies – especially economic or development policies that could contribute to tackling the root causes of migration. Civil society stakeholders (especially in Tunisia) pointed at the sometimes problematic inter-institutional relations and overlapping of competences between different ministries and institutions involved in migration policy-making. Some national authorities were also criticized for their lack of transparency, uncooperative attitude and unwillingness to participate in a dialogue with CSOs.

Stakeholders in Turkey highlighted the lack of coordination mechanisms between the central and local levels of government and administration. In top-down terms, the lack of clear guidance from the centre to the local level was highlighted as contributing to the unstandardized implementation of the legal and policy framework on migration and asylum, and insufficient central monitoring leading to discretionary practices by implementers. In bottom-up terms, the local level has difficulty in making its voice heard by the centre, with negative effects on the devising of locally tailored measures. In this respect, it was highlighted that local authorities are insufficiently involved in EU projects, as opposed to central institutions, which receive capacity enhancement support.

CSOs in SEM countries: Between advocacy, antagonism and active involvement

After the Arab Spring, international and local NGOs and CSOs were able to strengthen their role and widen their scope of action in SEM countries, especially in Tunisia and Morocco, where they started to implement (or intensified) support and advocacy activities addressing the situation of sub-Saharan migrants and refugees in the two countries. Through their advocacy campaigns, they claim they put pressure on national governments in order to improve, or start improving, the legal and policy framework on migration and asylum in both countries.[3]

Despite that, local CSOs complained about the lack of a truly participatory decision-making process and expressed their wish to actively participate in migration policy-making. While most CSOs in Morocco (especially migrant associations) have taken a more radically antagonistic

3   Moroccan CSOs claim they played a crucial role in promoting the two migrant regularization campaigns implemented in Morocco in 2014 and 2016.

stance towards the EU and the national government (which reveals also a higher level of politicization of the issue), the most influential Tunisian CSOs have displayed a cooperative attitude, valuing the opportunity of being involved in negotiations with the EU, and demonstrating that migration in Tunisia is not politicized at all (see more on the de-politicization, or better non-politicization, of migration in Tunisia in Roman and Pastore 2018a: 8–9; see also Abderrahim and Zardo 2018: 87–90). This difference may be due to different factors, including (but not limited to): a longer tradition of openly critical and independent CSOs in Morocco (whilst in Tunisia they developed only after 2011); a stronger presence of sub-Saharan migrants' associations in Morocco compared to Tunisia (in terms of both number and weight); and closer ties between Tunisian CSOs and the EU, also due to the EU's attempt to establish a new form of cooperation with civil society actors in Tunisia, by systematically involving them in the political dialogue and negotiations with the government (Roman 2018: 12).

However, in Tunisia as in the other researched countries, it emerged that not all types of local CSOs are involved in the dialogue with the EU or in the implementation of EU-funded projects. Usually those involved are part of international NGO networks, have strong links with Europe, have professional staff, and have the administrative skills and know-how to access EU funding and implement EU projects. However, as argued by a Tunisian scholar, these organizations "are more focused on the European agenda; they are well-organised, they do a good job, but they are less independent" (Roman and Pastore 2018b: 25). On the other hand, smaller genuinely local grassroots CSOs, whose international network is limited (if not completely absent) and whose activity is largely based on voluntary work, struggle to be involved in policy-making and in consultations with institutional actors (and they face difficulties in accessing international funding).

2.3 SUBSTANCE

As concerns the substance of the EU migration policy in the Mediterranean, SEM stakeholders focused on the ineffectiveness of the EU's Eurocentric and security-oriented policies. They highlighted that these policies have a negative impact on human security and rights protection, and affect both the EU's credibility as a human rights champion and the development of a sound rights-based approach to migration and asylum in SEM countries. The most critical civil society stakeholders highlighted also how post-colonial domination relationships affect the governance of migration.

INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE EU'S EUROCENTRIC APPROACH IN MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

Civil society and governmental actors in all SEM countries criticized the EU's Eurocentric approach to cooperation with third countries, not only in the field of migration but in all policy fields. The EU was criticized for adopting a unilateral top-down approach to decision-making; in the words of a Moroccan NGO representative, "solutions are not the result of peer-to-peer dialogue. The North imposes its own solutions on the governments of the South" (Harrami and Mouna 2018: 20). Such an approach is focused on European interests (either security- or economy-related) while neglecting SEM countries' priorities and needs. This results in a lack of ownership on the part of SEM stakeholders, which risks impacting on policy effectiveness. The EU is also criticized for displaying what a Turkish CSO representative described as a "one-size-fits-all approach" (Okyay 2018: 17) – i.e., for treating every SEM country it engages with in substantially the same way, replicating the same strategies and trying to implement similar policies, disregarding the specificities of each country.

Limited effectiveness and sustainability of the EU's security-oriented restrictive migration policies

There was wide convergence among all SEM stakeholders on the negative implications of increasingly restrictive, preventive and control-oriented migration management policies for human security and human rights, as well as the ineffectiveness of such measures in the long term. All stakeholders touched upon insufficient efforts by the EU, European countries and the international community for poverty reduction and conflict resolution as factors affecting migrant and refugee flows.

Moroccan and Tunisian stakeholders noted that migration in Europe is no longer perceived as a factor of development but as a threat, to which the EU has responded with restrictive policies, focused on closing borders and limiting the freedom of movement. Thus, the EU migration policy has succeeded in changing the Mediterranean from a space of exchange into a wall. In their view, this securitized perception of migration reflects Europe's phobia of migrants, but contrasts with factual reality, as nowadays the largest mobility in the world is South–South. As stated by a Moroccan para-governmental stakeholder,

> contrary to what is rumoured, migration in the world is taking place more between countries of the South than from countries in the South to countries in the North. This is not a made up fantasy, statistics reveal that. Death boats have probably encouraged the dissemination of false news. We wonder why there is a tendency to systematically link South-North migration to security and this link is never made when it comes to North-South migration. (Harrami and Mouna 2018: 12)

Lebanese and Turkish stakeholders criticized the EU and European countries for externalizing not only border control but also asylum seekers' reception and protection. In their view, the EU's restrictive policies are aimed at limiting both the influx of migrants seeking asylum in Europe and the resettlement of refugees from third countries.

SEM stakeholders highlighted that the EU has also succeeded in expanding its security-oriented migration policy beyond its territory, at the expense of human rights. This resulted in the introduction of border and migration control measures in areas where populations used to circulate freely (e.g., in the ECOWAS countries). In the case of Turkey, stakeholders observed that enhanced EU–Turkey cooperation in the field of migration, which culminated in the 2016 EU–Turkey Statement, has led to the strengthening of restrictive policies also in Turkey (e.g., hardening of borders, more stringent inland controls, intra-country mobility restrictions for Syrian refugees, introduction of visa requirements and readmission agreements with non-EU countries).

Moroccan and European civil society actors stressed specifically the negative impact that this security-oriented approach has on development policies. They argued that some European funding instruments (e.g., the EU Trust Fund for Africa) which are meant to support socio-economic development in countries of origin and transit, are instead used to finance border control, migration management and securitizing policies. As affirmed by a European civil society actor, "the problem is that [these funding instruments] are used with a securitizing approach" (Roman 2018: 9). This securitization of the migration-development nexus is criticized as it goes against the goal of tackling the root causes of migration.

Impact of the diffusion of restrictive policies on the EU's credibility as a human rights champion and on the development of rights-based approaches in SEM countries

Civil society stakeholders in the four target SEM countries emphasized the fact that the EU has lost part of its credibility as a human rights champion and guardian, especially due to the establishment or strengthening of cooperation on migration management with dictatorships and countries with a bad human rights record. European policies have had a negative impact on EU relations with its southern neighbours. The objectives of democratization and increased human rights protection promoted by the EU after the Arab Spring have rapidly faded away. This is problematic not only because it affects the EU's credibility, but especially because it hampers the achievement of highly relevant objectives in terms of development and consolidation of rights-based and principled approaches in SEM countries.

The EU response to the 2015 "migration crisis" legitimized the idea that not fully respecting international legal standards could be justified for the sake of achieving control-oriented policy objectives. As highlighted in particular by civil society actors in Turkey, this would have long-lasting negative effects for Turkey and other non-European countries, where migration and asylum systems are either poorly developed or non-existent and the concept of asylum as an internationally inscribed human right and state obligation is not consolidated. The bad example set by the EU also weakens the hand of local CSOs, as they can no longer push their national governments based on the need to align with European standards.

Instrumentalization of migration and asylum

Civil society actors (especially in Morocco and Turkey) criticized the instrumentalization of migration, international protection and humanitarian aid through these issues being turned into matters of political and financial bargaining by countries on both sides of the Mediterranean. SEM countries agree to cooperate in the field of border control, migration management, asylum and readmission in exchange for receiving assistance, support and funding from the EU and European countries. However, as specified by Moroccan CSOs, the instrumentalization of migration is two-sided: SEM countries are aware of the European need for third countries' cooperation and use it to obtain the best quid pro quo, and to advance their own economic and political interests.

Impact of continued post-colonial domination relationships on migration

Grassroots CSOs in Morocco, and especially sub-Saharan migrants' associations, claimed that European post-colonial domination relationships have promoted (and continue to promote) the uneven development of the two sides of the Mediterranean. This impacts negatively on vital sectors such as education, healthcare and employment in both SEM and sub-Saharan countries, contributing to continued migration.

Displaying a highly critical attitude, which did not emerge in these terms from CSOs in the other SEM countries, Moroccan civil society stakeholders and African migrants' associations based in Morocco denounced the plundering of the wealth of the South by the economic forces of the North, which contributes to maintaining misery and instability, forcing people to migrate: "the great powers pump the wealth out of countries of the South, and this leads to the impoverishment of these countries" (Harrami and Mouna 2018: 11). They pointed at the support ensured by European countries (and more in general the global North) to multinational corporations, and the connivance with or complacency towards authoritarian regimes in the South. In their view, this is a strategy aimed at the perpetuation of the European domination in

the African continent, which involves also the governance of migration.

3. The Gender Dimension: Female Migration As a "Non-Issue" and the Lack of Gender-Specific Migration Policies

When analyzing gender sensitivity in the area of migration, we may consider two levels: the level of narratives and the level of policies. With regard to the former, the MEDRESET fieldwork has demonstrated that the mainstream narrative both in the four SEM countries and in Europe tends to represent migration as a pre-eminently male phenomenon (especially along the Central Mediterranean route) and largely disregards female migration.

In none of the researched countries did gender-specific issues spontaneously emerge in the voice of stakeholders; this applies both to governmental and civil society actors, with the sole exception of a couple of scholars and representatives of women's associations in Turkey and Tunisia. Other interviewees touched upon the issues of female emigration to Europe and/or migrant women and female refugees present in the country only after being explicitly asked about this by the interviewers. Even in this case, the large majority of SEM stakeholders could not provide much information and admitted that female-specific issues are considerably low-ranking in the hierarchy of migration-related priorities.

Thus, female migration is underrepresented in the dominant discourse of both European and SEM interlocutors. Issues such as the emigration of SEM women alone, female refugees in Lebanon and Turkey, domestic workers in Lebanon, (often trafficked) sub-Saharan migrant women in Tunisia and Morocco, as well as the consequences of male migration on SEM women "left behind", are systematically left out of the picture. This is a worrying trend because migrant and refugee women risk to remain hidden to the eyes of both institutional actors and the broader civil society, both in Europe and in SEM countries. In addition, when migrant women come to be the object of public discourse, a victimizing narrative prevails on both sides of the Mediterranean. Women tend to be represented as vulnerable subjects, as victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation and labour exploitation as domestic workers; but this victimization risks to deny agency to migrant women.

With regard to EU policies, the perspective of European civil society stakeholders contrasts with the views expressed by EU institutional actors. EU officials made reference to the standard EU programmatic stance according to which gender sensitivity is incorporated in all EU policies. In addition, when asked about EU policies addressing specifically female migrants/refugees, all EU institutional representatives focused on the issue of human trafficking and on European policies aimed at contrasting this phenomenon.

Conversely, all European civil society stakeholders stated that the EU does not have an overall strategy to mainstream gender sensitivity in its cooperation policies in the field of migration and asylum, and that there is a clear lack of specific gender policies; in the interviewees' words: "Gender is a word that you can find in many EU policy documents, but in fact there are no gender policies"; "external migration policies are consistently and permanently ignoring gender-specific issues"; "if we consider that in Libya we have a situation of systematic sexual

violence against women, which is not only tolerated but also legitimated by the EU, it does not seem to me that we can talk of gender-sensitive EU policies" (Roman 2018: 11). The EU, instead, tends to finance and implement female-specific projects, especially relating to human trafficking (as this is the almost exclusive focus of EU action when it comes to migrant women). However, as stated by a European NGO representative, "such initiatives are only at the project level, not at the policy level" (Roman 2018: 11).

4. Policy Recommendations

Based on the stakeholders' evaluation of the EU's approach to migration cooperation in the Mediterranean area and of the policies it has implemented, the following recommendations can be made.

1) Establish a more comprehensive and balanced partnership-based cooperation
EU policy instruments adopted so far are largely informed by a compartmentalized approach to different policy areas; however migration cuts across different policy areas and involves political, security and socio-economic issues. For instance, both Tunisian and Lebanese stakeholders emphasized the link between migration and existing economic and trade agreements with the EU, which are seen as penalizing in particular their agricultural sector, with clear implications in terms of potential income generation and emigration trends. On this point, a Tunisian CSO representative argued that "Tunisia cannot merely play the role of Europe's border guard; we need to cooperate also in different fields in an integrated way and on a more equal basis; for instance, we need to enter into economic agreements that do not penalize Tunisian agriculture" (Roman and Pastore 2018a: 20). EU cooperation with SEM countries should thus be based on truly integrated and comprehensive policy instruments, which may allow for a greater coordination among cooperation policies in different fields. In addition, all SEM stakeholders described relations with the EU as unequal and unbalanced and claimed the need for a less Eurocentric and more balanced approach to cooperation in the field of migration, as well as in other policy fields.

2) Facilitate mobility and improve the governance of labour migration
The EU and its MSs should broaden and diversify authorized ways of migration and mobility, so as to cover international protection, labour migration for both high- and low-skilled workers, and migration with other motivations. Some concrete examples are: increasing resettlement quotas; opening humanitarian corridors; expanding multi-entry, job-search and study visas; broadening the scope of family reunification; and setting up additional legal pathways to enter Europe on a temporary or circular basis (e.g., seasonal and short-term migration schemes).

All SEM stakeholders stressed in particular the need to improve the governance of labour migration not only across the two shores of the Mediterranean, but also across the whole MENA region (not only South–North but also South–South) through an overall regional strategy that facilitates workers' mobility. Labour migration should be sustainable at the global level; therefore, EU policies cannot be focused on highly qualified workers only and cannot ignore the development needs of countries of origin. It should be noted that the current European Commission DG HOME has been playing a proactive role in this field, by implementing a series of initiatives on legal migration and proposing new labour migration "pilot projects" with selected countries, including Tunisia and Morocco (for additional information, see Roman 2018: 8).

3) Enhance resettlement and improve the governance of asylum seekers' reception

The EU needs to rethink and invest in fairer responsibility-sharing mechanisms for the provision of international protection. The engagement of European countries cannot be limited to financial transfers to hosting countries like Turkey and Lebanon, but should include permanent large-scale resettlement mechanisms. NGO- and charity-led resettlement programmes, such as the Mediterranean Hope humanitarian corridors in Lebanon, are successful initiatives that could be replicated and enlarged. However, such small-scale and targeted measures are insufficient; the EU and individual MSs should strengthen their state-led resettlement programmes in order to reach larger numbers of beneficiaries.

In addition, some Lebanese stakeholders suggested the EU consider alternative pathways to traditional resettlement, such as granting private sponsorships and work or study visas to UNHCR-recognized refugees. Further, resettlement has to take into account not only physical safety, but also the possibility of building a decent life in the receiving context, implying the importance of pre-departure training programmes (which are essential to ensure linguistic and socio-cultural integration in the country of destination) and matching mechanisms that take into account the refugee's family ties and skills–labour market match.

Stakeholders in Tunisia and Morocco highlighted that the EU and its MSs should provide additional support and financial resources to help the establishment of a proper asylum seekers' reception system in both countries and assist them in enhancing their reception and integration capacities. However, this does not mean that Maghreb countries are going to accept European projects of outsourcing refugee status determination (or pre-determination) procedures to their territory. Attempts to promote this idea have so far been firmly rejected, and were probably even counterproductive, as in Tunisia they have allegedly contributed to interrupting the process of adoption of a national legal framework on asylum (Roman and Pastore 2018a: 15–16).

4) Support reforms of the national legal, policy and institutional framework on migration and asylum in SEM countries

Civil society stakeholders in all SEM countries encouraged the EU to pressure their national authorities to improve the governance of migration and asylum in the respective countries, while protecting the fundamental rights of migrants and refugees. In particular, Tunisian CSOs asked the EU to support their claims vis-à-vis the national government for reforming the national legal and policy framework on migration.

5) Re-prioritize human rights and regain credibility in the eyes of civil society actors

EU cooperation with SEM countries needs to re-prioritize human rights protection, international legal standards and principled stances, which have been significantly overshadowed on the one hand by restrictive policies and securitized discourses, and on the other hand by an approach that is perceived as downgrading international protection to the level of a discretionary favour. The EU's lowering of its own human rights standards and those that it expects from SEM countries has negative implications for the development of rights-based migration policies in SEM countries. Furthermore, the EU's approach weakens the ability of SEM civil society actors to pressure their governments to comply with international legal standards.

6) Improve effectiveness and sustainability of EU-funded projects

The EU should improve its strategic planning of projects. In order for EU-funded projects to be

effective, they should focus on the needs identified by local actors, grassroots organizations and potential beneficiaries through a bottom-up process; their duration should correspond to the identified needs, and their sustainability should be guaranteed through continuous funding. In order to avoid project overlapping and unequal distribution of funds, the EU should improve coordination with other international and local actors involved in project funding or implementing. Moreover, EU-funded projects should not be addressed to migrants or refugees only, but should target the broader local community, including both migrants/refugees and nationals.

7) Mainstream gender sensitivity and implement gender-specific policies

It is important to note that no specific gender-related recommendations emerged from civil society stakeholders in SEM countries; instead, it was European civil society actors who recommended that the EU make its migration cooperation policies truly gender-sensitive. According to European CSOs, the EU's action should not be limited to the implementation of ad hoc female-specific projects, which in most cases address the issue of human trafficking only. In the area of migration, the EU is expected to have an overall structural gender policy, addressing different aspects of female migration in a comprehensive way and in a long-term strategic perspective. EU policies and discourse should also avoid the victimization of female migrants. For instance, European policy-makers should focus on migrant women also when elaborating labour migration policies; this would make it possible to start considering female migrants not only as victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation – i.e., as vulnerable subjects with protection needs – but also as workers with specific skills, which could match the European labour market needs. This would contribute to a recognition of their agency and role in the host society.

8) Enhance active involvement of local civil society actors and promote forms of participatory governance

Local stakeholders in Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey expressed criticism towards the lack of involvement of civil society actors in SEM countries in migration policy-making and negotiations with the EU. A request has emerged for more participatory policy instruments, more actively involving civil society and social partners on both shores of the Mediterranean. Such a cooperative governance of migration could be developed in different areas, ranging from legal migration to asylum seekers' reception and resettlement, migrant integration, short-term mobility and visa policy.[4] For instance, in the field of refugee reception and integration, Lebanese and Turkish stakeholders recommended that the EU prioritize bottom-up approaches to defining funding priorities and designing locally tailored assistance measures, and suggested a closer involvement of a broader range of grassroots organizations and local governments in these processes (and not only in the implementation phase).

However, when considering the possibility of more participatory forms of migration governance, CSOs in all SEM countries shared a common concern. They observed that the consultation and involvement of SEM countries' civil society actors on the part of the EU has so far resulted in the establishment of dialogue and cooperation with a certain type of stakeholders only.

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4   Similar claims arise from north of the Mediterranean: for instance, in its opinion SOC/604 "Visa Information System (VIS)" adopted on 19 September 2018, the European Economic and Social Committee recommended a more solid commitment on the part of the EU to cooperate with the governments and civil society of third countries in order to inform, prepare and assist their nationals throughout the visa application procedure. See EESC (2018).

This consists of relatively big and well-established CSOs, which are made up of professionals, have an international profile and strong ties with European stakeholders, and often benefit from the EU's financial support. The genuinely local grassroots organizations – which are less organized and resourceful, have a limited international profile (or none at all), and are often unable or unwilling to access EU funding – are generally neither involved nor consulted by EU institutions. This is what happens for instance in the case of Tunisia, which is instead considered by EU institutions as an experimental model of participatory decision-making (Roman 2018: 12).

Although local grassroots organizations are outside international networks and may have insufficient capacity to manage highly technical EU funding procedures, they are locally well embedded and may have deeper knowledge of the local context compared to INGOs and IOs. Therefore, their active involvement in both policy-making and implementation represents a key factor contributing to policy effectiveness. This applies also to external consultants; according to Lebanese stakeholders, the EU should hire local rather than European experts for research and consultancy tasks.

An additional concern was raised by European civil society actors, who stressed that CSOs and NGOs should not replace the state or public institutions in the provision of basic services and in the protection of fundamental rights. NGOs' involvement, for instance in asylum seekers' reception, resettlement or integration projects, is certainly positive but this should not lead to delegating to civil society actors the functions and responsibilities of the EU and national governments in Europe and SEM countries. Moreover, stakeholders stressed that civil society consultations and involvement in decision-making processes should not be intended as a mere formality, because too often they have the feeling of not being really listened to by EU institutions.

A final concern is related to the position of national governments in SEM countries, which may oppose the enhanced involvement of local CSOs in policy-making, and more in general their activism. For instance, representatives of the Lebanese government explicitly stated that non-institutional actors should not be involved in decision-making processes in the field of migration and asylum, as migration policy-making is under the exclusive competence of the state. Hence, they declared themselves to be against a more participatory governance of asylum seekers' reception and resettlement, notwithstanding the positive experiment of NGO-led humanitarian corridors.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has analysed how stakeholders in southern and eastern Mediterranean countries evaluate the EU's role, approach and policies in the field of migration, mobility and asylum, focusing on the policy instruments it has adopted, the actors involved (or not involved) in policy-making, and the substance of implemented policies. The analysis clearly shows that the EU's discourse is informed by two dominant frames – unilateralism and securitization – which translate into Eurocentric, securitizing and conditionality-based policies and practices. The analysis demonstrates also that female migration is underrepresented and misrepresented in both EU and SEM discourses, which translates in the lack of an overall strategy to mainstream gender in migration policy-making.

Many European scholars have analysed the unilateralism and securitization of the EU discourse from a critical perspective, but they usually do this based on a northern Mediterranean viewpoint and on Western critical thinking. What differentiates the MEDRESET project is that the claims of securitization and unilateralism are grounded on a strong empirical basis and incorporate a southern Mediterranean perspective. In addition, this South-Med perspective is anything but homogeneous, as it reflects the viewpoints of a wide range of stakeholders, including in particular different types of civil society actors and scholars, in four different SEM countries.

Despite the existence of country-specific issues and different migration policy agendas in the Maghreb and the Middle East, SEM stakeholders share a common perception of EU migration policies as abusively and inappropriately restrictive, elaborated in a unilateral way and imposed through unbalanced power relations. Based on this assessment, SEM stakeholders were asked to reflect on possible alternative policy solutions, and on how existing policies could be changed and improved. The policy recommendations addressed to the EU and presented in this paper have thus emerged directly from interviewed stakeholders in SEM countries. The fact that these recommendations are grounded on solid and credible empirical bases makes them particularly relevant and authoritative; this should lead European interlocutors to take them into serious consideration.

However, it is worth noting that the recommendations stemming from SEM civil society actors often do not go beyond the level of principles and lack technical substance. This is partly understandable due to the nature of the interviews and of our methodology, which often did not permit in-depth investigation on specific issues. But there might also be a more fundamental issue of technical preparedness of CSOs in SEM societies. Capacity-building efforts could be necessary in order to enable a real shift towards a more participatory international governance of migration and mobility.

To conclude, all in all, the spectrum of recommendations coming from our interviewees is largely consistent with the most advanced strands of the international debate on migration governance. In particular, the stakeholders' policy recommendations are fully attuned to the final draft of the "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration" (Global Compact for Migration 2018) that will be discussed in view of adoption at the Marrakech intergovernmental conference (10–11 December 2018). This harmony shows that civil society organizations in non-European countries (and possibly, more broadly, in the global South) do not hold marginal and merely reactive opinions, but rather advanced, globally shared and innovative ones. The future process of implementation of the Global Compact represents an important opportunity to give these alternative policy frames more visibility and authority, and possibly to turn them into concrete policy agendas.

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