6. Common Interests and Different Visions: Policy Implications for EU and Italy

Hélène Michou (ECFR), Stefano M. Torelli (ISPI)

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The last chapter of this report is aimed at analyzing the current relationship between Egypt and the EU and at identifying issues of common interest which could present opportunities for strategic collaboration. The last few years since the 2011 uprisings have entrenched a broad disconnect between Egypt’s “status quoist” policies and Europe’s apparent support for processes of democratic transition. Whilst both share concerns regarding security in the Mediterranean region, spillover from neighbouring conflicts, and promoting economic ties, Europe continues to face accusations of incoherence between its pledges and its practices.

How, then, to reconcile a European policy in the Mediterranean able to involve Egypt as a reliable partner and, at the same time, to ensure the promotion of essential European values in the field of civil and political rights? Where and how can the EU act to incorporate Egypt into a process of regional integration and cooperation on issues of shared importance? How can the EU deal with its loss of leverage in Egypt and in the region as a whole? Will heads of member states continue to look the other way as private sector bilateral deals are signed with a military regime systematically targeting the rights of Egyptian citizens? For European policy makers these issues raise further questions related to broader foreign policy strategy, commitment to deeper democracy, and the kind of relationship we want to maintain with Egypt.
Far from providing definitive answers to these policy matters, the first part of the chapter tackles these issues through an analysis of the extent to which both Egypt and the EU are foregoing legitimacy at home and on the international stage in the pursuit of bilateral interests. Mutual concerns regarding extremism, the crisis in Libya, economic cooperation and immigration are placed against the incumbent normative framework for bilateral relations, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). We look at the re-think currently surrounding this approach and ask whether a more honest acceptance of crises on all sides shouldn’t merit a bolder return to the drawing board. The second part of the chapter looks at bilateral relations between Italy and Egypt. Indeed, Rome has in some ways a ‘special’ relationship with Cairo. Italy is the first commercial partner of Egypt among European countries and Prime Minister Matteo Renzi is always keen to stress the importance of the relationship with Egypt. At the end of each part, the chapter offers some policy recommendations for Europe and specifically for Italy.

**EU and Egypt: towards a long-run policy?**

There is a two-way backsliding happening with regard to Europe’s relationship with Egypt. As strongman Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is welcomed open-armed in European capitals, as regional leaders flock to Cairo, and as foreign investments resume, observers could be forgiven for thinking that Egypt is ‘back to normal’. Problems arise however when this return to ‘normal’ is a policy of domestic repression dressed up as promotion of national stability. As Egypt comes full circle back to authoritarianism, Europe is also treading the wheel of past practices – reliance on strongmen due to a lack of political strength and strategic vision to support alternatives.

The main problem in defining a strategic approach towards Egypt and other countries of the southern Neighbourhood is that Europe’s policy-makers have yet to engage in a bold, collective re-think on how to deal with rupture and crisis in the region. The ENP as it stands is more for the partners we would like than for...
the neighbours we have. Whilst the ongoing revision of the ENP commissioned by Juncker goes some way towards addressing this disjuncture, it will need to be complemented by member state bilateral support and the political will to address sensitive issues such as migration flows.

This exercise is crucial to push back against the return to business as usual approach with Egypt, and equally to defining where interests converge. At stake is not only the management of pressing issues such as regional security threats and migration flows, but more importantly longer-term issues such as regional development and Europe’s credibility as a promoter of normative values at home and abroad.

**Fighting terrorism: a convenient smokescreen**

The principal selling point of Egyptian strongman Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to sponsors in Washington – and to a certain extent in European capitals – is that only he and his military-backed regime can end the threat from Islamic extremists and prevent his country of 90 million people from becoming a failed state. He has only to point to neighbouring Libya or nearby Yemen to drive his message home. But almost two years since the former general’s bloody coup against a democratically elected government, the facts are undeniable: Egypt is becoming steadily more violent and unstable.

Al-Sisi and his cabinet, governing by decree in the absence of an elected parliament, have overseen two years of near total impunity for security force abuses and issued a raft of laws that have severely curtailed civil rights, limited political space, and effectively erased important gains of the 2011 uprising that ousted Mubarak. Much of this has been carried out under the banner of fighting Islamist extremism and terrorism, two terms employed almost interchangeably by the regime.

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For its part, the international community seems to be having trouble grasping that it has seen this dynamic play out many times before: a repressive regime breeds more violence. It is buying into a security narrative promoted by the very autocrats that it is struggling to deal with in other parts of the region. Although support for Egypt’s struggle to contain incidents of extremist violence in the Sinai Peninsula is legitimate, accepting the regime’s labelling of all dissidents as terrorists is not. Daesh jihadis and Muslim Brotherhood sympathisers are tarred with the same brush; given that Daesh is now among the top security concerns for nearly all main stakeholders, Cairo is able to “free-ride on the momentum of cooperation among major regional players” to promote its anti-Islamist security discourse\(^2\). Similarly, cutting down on weapons smuggling does not justify the flattening of entire neighbourhoods or the eviction of vulnerable families to create a buffer zone with Gaza. Finally, the EU should recognize that the Egyptian state narrative of the war against terrorism is little more than a smokescreen for domestic repression, primarily aimed at the Muslim Brotherhood (declared a terrorist organization in December 2013) and its charitable affiliations, from NGOs to medical centres\(^3\). Along with biased media coverage, this fuels the damaging polarization within Egyptian society and moves the country increasingly away from any attempt at reconciliation, whether political or social.

**Libya: Egypt is as much part of the problem as an eventual solution**

The on-going conflict in Libya has been pitched by the Egyptian regime as part of its domestic battle against Islamist extremism. Whilst Egypt’s border with Libya, over 1000 km long, is a


challenge in terms of controlling flows of migrants and weapons and working with Egypt will be necessary to move towards a solution in the messy civil conflict, this does not mean that Europe should necessarily settle on Egyptian-driven proposals for resolving matters. And whilst shared disquiet of the rise of the Islamic State and its encroaching regional footprint will require broad cooperation, it should not equate to unequivocal support for Egypt’s regional strategy.

Regional dynamics favour a continuation of the war. Together with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt has conducted various air strikes in Libya and has provided arms to the Libyan National Army. To date Egypt has also engaged in diplomatic offensives at the UN to secure a mandate to intervene in the civil war and has lobbied hard for the arms embargo to be lifted on Libya (both these measures would merely allow al-Sisi’s regime to legally continue its current policy of arms deliveries to Tobruk and air raids targeting Khaftar’s forces). Egypt’s strategy has failed to gain diplomatic footholds in the international community (unless of course we count al-Sisi accepting an offer from Moscow to share imagery from Russian satellites to help monitor the Libyan border).

For now the UN Special Representative (UNSR), Bernardino León, is holding out hope that another round of talks will lead to a power-sharing deal of sorts. Nine months of negotiations have seen León and UNSMIL (United Nations Support Mission in Libya) come up with five different draft agreements, none of which have been palatable to the warring factions engaged in a zero sum game.4

Whilst exiting this zero-sum dynamic will be key to longer-term stability, the complexity of achieving this, given the track record of negotiations so far and the regional context, should not be underestimated. Apart from France and Italy briefly wavering

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4 For more on the main sticking points of various proposals to date, see M. Toaldo, “Can León achieve a limited agreement in Libya?”, Middle East Eye, 5 July 2015, http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/can-leon-achieve-limited-agreement-libya-493147980.
in March 2015, member states have stood firm behind UNSR León’s UN-led mediation efforts as the only solution to Libya’s problems. Yet he also acknowledges that “without the right regional policy and local policy it will not be possible to help Libyans get out of this”\(^5\). Joint European and American push-back against interventionist strategies is a sign that whilst the international community is supporting a framework it is doing so in a void of regional policy.

**Economic cooperation: arms up!**

The international community has unfortunately made clear to al-Sisi that we are prepared to pay mere lip service to human rights as the flow of aid, arms deals and business agreements resumes. Like any strongman looking to shore up a shaky domestic hold with international approval, al-Sisi understands the resonance in Washington and Brussels of claiming to be on the right side of the struggle against jihadist terrorism – especially when these same actors are at a loss as to how to contain the spread of Daesh/Islamic State.

President Obama placed a tombstone on his lofty aspirations for the Arab Spring in March 2015 by restoring Egypt to its position as second largest recipient of foreign military financing (behind Israel) to the tune of US$ 1.3bn, alongside the release of specific military items and equipment withheld since October 2013 including a dozen F-16 fighter jets, replacement kits for 125 Abrams tanks, and 20 Harpoon missiles\(^6\).

As for the partial embargo on arms sales which the EU imposed on post-coup, post-Rabaa Egypt following the bloody August of 2013, the lack of precise conditions left member states free to resume controversial contracts and sales practically at their

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choosing. The UK for instance did not wait long, until November of that same year to be precise, before reviewing its export licenses to Egypt and lifting almost 30 items from suspension. Earlier this year oil company BP signed a deal to invest US$ 12bn in Egypt. Al-Sisi’s upcoming visit to the UK will undoubtedly see the further signing of lucrative deals in defence and economic cooperation7.

France signed, amongst others, a “military cooperation contract” in November 2014 and concluded the € 5.2bn deal in April 2015. President Hollande has failed to justify exactly how 24 Rafale fighter jets, air-to-air missiles and a naval frigate will contribute to the remaining vestiges of Egypt’s democratic transition. In order to afford this deal, cash-strapped Egypt was offered a € 500mn down payment by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, whilst French banks loaned the remainder.

Not to be left out, Spain’s right-wing government also invited al-Sisi on an official state visit to Madrid in early May 2015 and the following week announced the signing of a MoU in military cooperation. The Spanish government had previously suspended the concession of new licenses for arms sales to Egypt, but opted to not revoke current ones (worth € 50mn in 2012). Finally, in the face of stiff opposition another formal invitation was extended to Sisi by Germany’s Chancellor Merkel8. During his visit to Berlin in June 2015 al-Sisi signed several energy agreements with multinational Siemens for a total of € 8bn9.

Given the resumption of many contracts and the signing of others, it is arguably too late to recommend member states to insist that the nature and extent of bilateral relations with Egypt going

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7 In a show of spectacularly poor timing, British Prime Minister David Cameron invited al-Sisi on an official visit to the UK the day after former President Morsi’s death sentence was announced by a Cairo court.


9 For more see “Siemens signs 8 billion euro power deal with Egypt”, Reuters, 3 June 2025, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/03/siemens-egypt-power-idUSL5N0YP41Z20150603.
forward should depend on the authorities taking concrete measures to end systematic violations of Egypt’s obligations under international law as well as its own constitution of 2014. It may not be too late, however, to convey that longer-term deeper investment by public and private sectors should be pegged to tangible improvements in respect for due process and the opening of political space.

Migration: beyond the numbers

This year has seen the Mediterranean’s worst year to date in terms of migrant deaths during attempted crossings. True to the fortress Europe mentality which is increasingly limiting the terms of the debate in Brussels, European leaders agreed in April 2015 to triple the funding for the bloc’s search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean in a bid to curb the soaring number of migrants making the crossing to European shores. The new naval operation announced thereafter by EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini, EUNAVFOR (European Union Naval Force) Med, will target the “business model” of smugglers and those who “benefit from the misery of migrants”\textsuperscript{10}. The extent to which the identification, capture and disposal of vessels will be effective and what exactly is meant by targeting ‘enabling assets’ remains to be seen, as does a coherent proposal for dealing with migration at its source. Critics claim that the EU is simply throwing money at the problem rather than addressing root causes and working with regional actors to dismantle the networks of smugglers.

The other controversial policy proposal on the table is the quota system as part of the so-called European Agenda on Migration. In a domestic context where strong anti-immigration sentiment has helped fuel the rise of nationalist and often populist political movements in several member states, spreading the

burden of crisis amongst countries has faced stiff opposition from the likes of Britain and Hungary. Paris and Berlin for their part want to “Europeanise” the registration and deportation of migrants, handing the powers to EU agencies. Within Europe further tenisons are mounting between Italy on the one hand and France and Austria – which have closed their borders to stop migrants moving north – on the other. Questions of internal security controls, refugee registration, and freedom of movement also pose challenges to northern and southern member stakes seeking to reach a compromise.

The initial mandatory quota system proposed by the European Commission has since been shelved in the face of this opposition; a voluntary system will apply instead for 40,000 asylum seekers who will be relocated from Greece and Italy over the coming two years. At the time of writing the Commission was expected to reach a deal with member states by August regarding the specific distribution of these migrants (plus the resettlement of a further 20,000 refugees from outside the EU) based on criteria of population size, GDP, unemployment rate, and previous efforts made at resettling refugees.

Although both the quota system and the naval exercise represent an attempt at fresh thinking by policy-makers in Brussels, fortress Europe alone will not stem the flow of migrants seeking a better life on the other side of the Mediterranean. EU cooperation in economic projects in migrant home and transit countries can contribute to curbing the root causes, as can investment in key sectors at the source of migration flows, namely job creation, access to education, healthcare, and agriculture.

In terms of immigration, Egypt is host to limited flows of migrant workers, but rising numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. In addition to some 70,000 Palestinian refugees whose

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11 For the specific criteria contained in the distribution key that the Commission will use to establish a member state’s capacity to absorb and integrate refugees, see Annex - European schemes for relocation and resettlement, A European Agenda on Migration, 13 May 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf.
families arrived in the wake of the 1948 war, tens of thousands of refugees from Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, as well as Iraq, Syria and Libya are now stranded in Egypt. Whereas Egypt has achieved high levels of institutionalization in its emigration policies, the institutional framework regulating its immigration apparatus remains frail. Temporary flows towards Arab countries have traditionally exceeded permanent flows to the US and Europe. Cooperation with Egypt regarding flows of refugees, human trafficking and other transnational crimes is key to the EU’s relationship with this strategic nexus between the turbulent Middle East, Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa routes.

Taking a step back: Europe’s foreign policy review

The on-going ENP review should be seen in the context of a broader review of the EU’s foreign policy and its instruments. Many of the boats that have been missed over the past couple of years by the EU with regards to Egypt were not just ENP choices but rather, bigger foreign policy choices. This re-think is in large part a didactic exercise for the EU to begin accepting the reality that Europe is surrounded by long-term crises on all sides, and how to go about moulding new policies from this starting point.

Europe finds itself understandably confused about how best to promote the objectives enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. Instead of a ring of stable, prosperous democratic states following almost a decade of association agreements, special partnerships, and promotion of deeper democracy, Europe is surrounded by an arc of instability, civil conflicts, and sectarian violence. Somewhere a recalculation is called for. Namely, geographic proximity as a conditioning factor for a closer relationship is no longer necessarily the case. Nor should Europe take for granted that

12 For more information see MPC Migration Profile: Egypt, Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute, June 2013, http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/migration_profiles/Egypt.pdf.
neighbouring states seek closer integration with the EU. The neighbourhood is increasingly crowded with actors who have equally if not more interesting offers for countries such as Egypt.

In this regard the Consultation paper released by the Commission and EU foreign affairs chief goes someway to an honest self-examination following 10 years of implementation of the policy, asking pertinent questions regarding the future direction of the ENP\textsuperscript{14}. Amongst other issues, it considers whether a single framework should continue to cover both the east and south; whether the current geographical scope should be maintained or broadened, whether AAs (Association Agreements) and DCFTAs (Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements) are the right objective for all, and how we can boost empowerment of the younger generation economically, politically and socially.

An issue of interest that does not seem to feature in consultations to date is that of “conceptual confusion”\textsuperscript{15}. How deep is European commitment to democratisation? How deep is our belief in the transformative power of our toolkit to achieve it? How far are we prepared to go in chastising other countries following democratic setbacks such as military coups? Are our attitudes to security as consistent as the US? The EU is often accused of being afraid to articulate its strategic priorities, and of being Janus-faced when it comes to rhetorical commitments to values contradicted by support for the undemocratic practices of authoritarian regimes. This disjuncture is accentuated by member state bilateral policies that prioritize cooperation in areas of security, economy and energy, preferring to focus on business opportunities rather than long-term stability. It could be argued that the ENP allows member states to pursue their bilateral business dealings whilst hiding comfortably behind the values-based ENP.

Policy makers claim the mood and moment is ripe in Brussels for ambitious re-thinking. Yet this may not be the case in member


\textsuperscript{15} N. Witney, S. Dennison (2015).
state capitals. A key challenge any revised ENP will face lies in getting buy-in from EU states for fundamental changes to the approach to the neighbourhood, as the immigration quota issue under discussion at the time of writing demonstrates. Grouping issues into baskets of thematic co-operation (for instance energy, migration, human trafficking etc.) with initiatives to be based on substance rather than geography is one of the options under discussion in the review and could be key to securing the buy-in of member states as well as the support of regional actors. That said, given how crowded the neighbourhood is getting in terms of other parties, Europe will have to consider the trade-offs it is prepared to make or politically willing to accept as an actor of secondary influence.

Policy recommendations for the EU: divergences and convergences

- The Egyptian government headed by President al-Sisi presides over the gravest human rights crisis in Egypt in decades. The EU must decide how it wishes to frame its dealings with Egypt post-roadmap. To date it has intentionally or otherwise endorsed the key stages of this so-called roadmap, without demonstrating sufficient concern for the context in which these procedures took place. Brussels and member states should stop overlooking Egyptian government abuses, including the lack of accountability for killings of protesters by security forces, mass detentions, military trials of civilians, hundreds of death sentences, and the forced eviction of thousands of families in the Sinai Peninsula. There has been no attempt on behalf of the Egyptian authorities at transitional justice or at conducting impartial investigations into excesses of power committed by law enforcement bodies during the key period of Egypt’s problematic transition.
- The EU has various channels through which to engage the Egyptian authorities alongside efforts to support civil society initiatives. Both in public statements and closed-door bilaterals,
policy makers should be more vocal in condemning military trials for civilians\textsuperscript{16}. European Union officials and member state representatives should make clear that the nature and extent of economic and political relations with Egypt going forward will depend on the Egyptian authorities taking prompt and concrete measures to put an end to government policies that systematically violate Egypt’s obligations under international human rights law as well as the Egyptian Constitution of 2014. Whilst the constitution contains language that appears to protect free expression, peaceful assembly, and association, the actions of branches of state security and the judiciary have yet to demonstrate respect for these clauses, let alone submit to independent monitoring mechanisms.

- The question remains if al-Sisi is able and willing to slow domestic polarization by taking steps towards a more inclusive political contract, or whether terms such as ‘reconciliation’ and ‘compromise’, will remain dirty words in Egypt’s politics. The al-Sisi regime must make a critical calculation as to how it will deal with the Brotherhood. It can either open the social and political arena, allowing for greater participation, or it can continue to increase repression, limit political space and inadvertently fuel potential violent outbreaks. As the Tunisian Minister of Education said in June 2015 at the US and Islam Global Forum in Doha, “after dangerous polarization we learnt to recognize each other and how to consider the other as Tunisian as me”. Drafting a new social contract takes time; willingness to listen to diverse voices of civil society is key and the Egyptian regime is going the wrong way about winning the support of civil society actors.

- With every member state that welcomes al-Sisi with open arms, it becomes more difficult for the EU to retain its credibility as a norms and values actor in the region. Just as the US’s resumption of military aid in the name of “national

security” has damaged its claims that human rights were a priority concern for the United States, so the EU looks rather sheepish condemning the death penalty when a key member state extends an official invitations to al-Sisi the day after Morsi’s sentence is announced. Similarly, “supporting the Egyptian people in their struggle for a democratic inclusive transition” – a frequent sentence in communiqués – rings false when placed alongside a lack of concrete action to help secure the release of human rights defenders, civil society activists, and journalists.

• Whilst the EU continues to express concern at ongoing restrictions of fundamental democratic rights, notably the freedom of expression, association, assembly, political pluralism and the rule of law in Egypt, these statements are not often backed up by actions. The ban on arms sales imposed in August 2013 should be revisited with a view to extending it, given the behaviour of Egyptian security forces in the repression of peaceful protests. For their part member states should adhere to the global arms trade treaty approved at the UN General Assembly in April 2013 designed to ensure that states stop transferring arms to countries where it is likely they will be used for human rights abuses.

• With regards to the ongoing review of the ENP, prioritizing baskets of issues over countries per se because of geographic location would allow funds to be re-allocated from countries that have backtracked or remained at a standstill on rule of law and issues of due process such as Egypt. It would also be a subtle way of applying the less for less principle, which Europe seemingly can’t quite find the courage to do. The EU should consider applying the term ‘strategic side-lining’ in its revised ENP. This is not to say that many of the projects supported by the ENP are out of date or of questionable value; support for civil society and economic development lay the groundwork for future collaborations with critically engaged actors and should be maintained. Finally, an honest re-think may involve accepting that whilst we see compromise, tolerance and
cooperation as beneficial values for all, those who play the zero sum game in the region play by different rules: winning, exclusion, and holding on to power. “In ways we have largely forgotten about in Europe, nationalism and religion have reasserted themselves as some of the most powerful determinants of human behaviour” in the region\textsuperscript{17}.

\textbf{Italy towards Egypt: a ‘special relationship’ in the Mediterranean}

In the broader framework of Mediterranean relations, the relationship between Italy and Egypt constitutes an important axis. Indeed, if Italy is trying to carve out a role in the Mediterranean, Egypt is seeking to regain central player status in the Middle East. In this context, bilateral cooperation might carry greater weight than it did just a few years ago. However, many of al-Sisi’s policies and positions since his seizure of power in July 2013 have clashed with Italian interests. On the basis of such considerations, the Italian government faces a difficult dilemma. On the one hand, it has to confront the need for good relations with one of the most important countries for the balance and stability of the whole of North Africa and the Near East. On the other, as a member state of a continent whose foreign policy is based on a normative framework, Italy should seek the channels through which to influence Egypt’s authoritarian practices, both in terms of domestic and regional policies.

In this regard, opportunities for positive aspects of cooperation and relations with Egypt entail mainly economic opportunities. Within the EU, Italy is the largest commercial partner of Egypt and ranks as the world’s first partner for Egyptian exports\textsuperscript{18}. The Italian presence in Egypt does not only concern large national companies, such as energy and infrastructure companies, but also small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The latter notably

\textsuperscript{17} N. Witney, S. Dennison (2015).

\textsuperscript{18} Istat, 2014.
provide important models for the Egyptian business world, which appears able to benefit in terms of development. Italy’s government attaches particular importance to bilateral relations with Cairo. Since 2014, Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and al-Sisi have had three meetings centered almost entirely on business opportunities and private sector cooperation. In March 2015 at Egypt’s much trumpeted Sharm el-Sheikh international economic conference, Renzi was the only European head of government to personally participate.

Regarding security cooperation, relations have also been very intense, as seen by the visits of the highest representatives of Italian security forces to Egypt, especially to tackle the thorny issue of instability in Libya and the risk of spillover. Support for a country as important as Egypt should represent a cornerstone of Italian policies in the Mediterranean, especially those aimed at involving southern partners to find effective regional solutions for the socio-economic crisis and broader instability across borders. Nonetheless, Italian cooperation should not unconditionally support the ‘Sisi way’ of resolving issues, and must instead push a long-term vision for sustainable political reform in Egypt. In this regard certain socio-political dynamics triggered by al-Sisi’s government are not compatible with Italian long-term goals for a stable and secure Mediterranean: namely the security-driven approach that al-Sisi has adopted in his so-called roadmap, the exclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood and practically all opposition from the political process, the polarization of positions between the military and members of political Islam, the alignment with policies of Gulf monarchies (especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), and the expansion of his fight against terrorism to Libya and the region.

Therefore, the priority for Italy is to help keep Egypt on what remains of its tracks of political transition and to avoid further regional destabilization which endanger Italian bilateral economic

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interests. With this goal in mind, Rome should try to pursue certain objectives.

**Policy recommendations for Italy: avoiding radicalization and improving economic support**

- From the political point of view, and in line with other European players, Italy should pressure Egypt to abandon its ongoing exclusionary policies, in order to begin moving towards a more inclusive political process before the parliamentary elections. Tolerance and room for the participation of other stakeholders in Egypt is essential to preventing future waves of instability. Whilst inclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood in political dialogue is arguably too hasty, Egypt should be urged to re-examine certain laws aimed at entrenching the status quo. In particular, law 107/2013, which regulates public protests, gives security forces the right to suppress demonstrations of dissent and forbids gatherings of people in public places without prior authorization from the government.

- The potential radicalization of certain offshoots from Islamist movements will bring to bear on Egypt’s internal security, as shown by the rise of jihadist groups, now mainly present in the Sinai Peninsula. It is important that Italy and its European partners avoid parroting the Egyptian narrative that all opposition is terrorism. Italy has a strong national presence on Egyptian territory: companies, diplomats and Italian tourists, especially on the coasts of the Red Sea. Any joint policy against terrorism – identified as a threat to be eradicated both

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21 At times of harsh conflict between jihadist groups and the Mubarak regime, tourist resorts on the Red Sea and the Egyptian archaeological sites were targets of numerous terrorist attacks causing dozens of victims among tourists of foreign nationality.
for Italy and for Egypt – must distinguish between jihadist cells and the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, at the risk of encouraging the radicalization of disenfranchised elements. Moreover, in the Sinai Peninsula, the local population should be directly involved and their socio-economic grievances should be addressed.

• When it comes to security in the Mediterranean, alongside the fight against jihadi terrorism, an overarching Italian priority is the stabilization of Libya and the resolution of the current political stalemate. Doubtlessly Egypt is among the regional actors that will have to be involved in reaching a final deal in Libya’s crisis. At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that Italy and Egypt have different interests and, consequently, different positions on the course of action needed to reach this deal. Cairo aims to extend its domestic repression of all elements related to political Islam, without distinguishing between jihadist forces and those affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood (as is the case – for the time being at least – of a part of the Tripoli-based government). For its part Italy has backed the UN-led process of political dialogue between the warring factions. Between these two positions there is potential room for Italy to carve out a role for itself bringing Egypt into the fold of international negotiations.

• At the regional level, Italian efforts should be directed at mending the differences between prominent actors in the Near East. The rift between Turkey and Egypt, for example, is one of the factors underlying Libya’s stalemate\(^\text{22}\). Among European member states, Italy is historically one of the closest partners of Turkey and it has always expressed a position in favor of Turkey’s accession to the EU. Rome has the capacity in terms of diplomacy to mediate a rapprochement between Turkey and Egypt. Such a step would be desirable, as it could help to solve some regional crises, first of all the one in Libya.

\(^\text{22}\) Indeed, it is widely recognized that Ankara is currently supporting the self-proclaimed government in Tripoli, while Egypt is a strong supporter of the Tobruk government and of the forces of General Haftar.
- The energy sector represents US$ 1bn of Egyptian exports to Italy\textsuperscript{23} and is potentially one of the most important for the development of Egypt. However, it suffers from severe structural and security problems. As a result of terrorist activities in the Sinai, the main eastward pipeline (Arab Gas Pipeline) is currently threatened, while constant attacks against infrastructure have undermined national export capacity\textsuperscript{24}. In addition to helping contain ad hoc attacks, Italy can play an important role in further developing Egypt’s energy sector and in improving its efficiency. In particular, ENI (the largest foreign company in the Egyptian energy sector) has signed agreements with the Egyptian government to conduct operations in Sinai, the Nile Delta, the Gulf of Suez and the Mediterranean for a total value of US$ 5bn over the next five years\textsuperscript{25}. Italian government support for the activities of national energy companies in Egypt should ideally be pegged to concrete political and economic reforms of the Egyptian authorities aimed at opening up their markets, attracting FDI (Foreign Direct Investment), and supporting domestic SMEs.

- Regarding the thorny issue of immigration, in recent months, the EU and Italy have repeatedly called for a solution to the Mediterranean crossings that directly involve southern partners. Egypt is an active partner in the Khartoum process, launched in Rome in 2014\textsuperscript{26}. This initiative could provide the

\textsuperscript{23} Istat, 2014.


\textsuperscript{26} The process, also known as “EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative”, was launched in Rome on 28 November 2014. The main goal of the initiative is to develop cooperation at bilateral and regional level between countries of origin, transit and destination to tackle irregular migration and criminal networks, as could be seen in the Declaration of the Ministerial Conference of the Khartoum Process. The full text of the declaration could be found on http://www.esteri.it/mae/approfondimenti/2014/20141128_political_declaration.pdf. The first Steering Committee Meeting of the EU-Horn of African Initiative, attended by the
framework for implement new migration policies by directly involving the southern countries. Egypt is one such transit countries for refugees fleeing Syria who then continue to Libya before sailing northbound towards Italian coasts. Involving Egypt in any political solution to migration flows will be crucial, though European partners should keep in mind the regime’s security-narrative as a smokescreen for domestic repression when defining the parameters of any such deal.

- Indeed, the proposal to set up refugee camps in countries of the southern Mediterranean should be accompanied by assurances that refugees will be guaranteed full rights within these structures. Such guarantees could only come about with a change in current Egyptian policy and with stricter independent oversight of the security services. Reports of ill-treatment and abuse of migrants by traffickers, especially in the Sinai, are common. These violations often occur with the complicity of Egyptian officials, which in turn reminds us that security sector reform and tackling corruption remain prominent issues in Egyptian domestic reforms.

- Finally, the issue of immigration is also linked to that of internal security in Egypt itself. If the political and security context remains unstable in the medium-long term it is possible that this can lead to new migration flows from Egypt. To avoid such a scenario, Italy and other EU member states must refrain from a continuation of their ‘back to normal’ policies with the Egyptian regime and must push for a shift towards a more inclusive political process.

International Organization for Migration (IOM), was held right in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on May 2015 with the participation of five African countries (Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan), and five EU member states (France, Germany, Italy, Malta and the UK).