

A Comparative Analysis of Migration Control in the Mediterranean: Externalisation of Border Control vs Instrumentalisation of Migration

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For a long time, an important number of scholars have argued that the European Union (EU) and member states have successfully managed to implement a strategy of externalisation of migration policies. A strategy that consists of moving border and immigration controls outward towards the Mediterranean and Maghreb transit/source countries of migration. Within this literature, the common view sees sending/transit states' compliance with migration control as the result of the EU and member states successfully implementing means of pressure and greater persuasive bargaining power. For this reason, EU neighbouring countries are usually seen merely as "Gendarmes of Europe".

However, the refugee crisis and especially the negotiations to reach the EU-Turkey deal have revealed realities that have been underestimated too often and for too long. First, the EU's capacity to stem migration flows depends directly on the good will, capacity and interests of neighbouring countries to cooperate on migration control. Second, the EU's neighbours are not only hard negotiators but above all they can successfully use migration control as a powerful bargaining chip in order to achieve strong bargaining power and substantial benefits from the EU and its member states.

Indeed, the refugee crisis is not the first case in which an EU neighbour has used irregular migration and its role as the EU's gatekeeper to obtain greater leverage and negotiating power over the EU and its member states (Greenhill, 2010).

For example, in the first decade of the 2000s, by threatening the EU with allowing irregular migrants to reach European coasts but also by strategically cooperating on migration control, the Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi not only got resources and equipment from Italy in order to control migration flows, but also international legitimacy and the suspension of the economic embargo (Paoletti & Pastore, 2010).

Moreover, since the Perejil islet conflict, the Moroccan bargaining position has been empowered in relation to Spain and the EU due to its strategic cooperation on migration control. Morocco has applied a migration policy as a foreign policy instrument but it has also instrumentalised irregular migration, migration control cooperation and non-cooperation as foreign policy tools. Since Morocco and Spain redefined the bilateral

relationship in 2002 and reinforced their migration control cooperation, numerous factors demonstrate the increasing support that Morocco has received from Spain and the EU over the years (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2016). The ENP, the Advanced Status, the political and economic support during and after the Arab Springs, the increasing pro-Moroccan position of Spain regarding the Western Sahara, or the substantial Spanish and EU investment and economic exchange are just some proof of the increasing interconnection and interdependence between Morocco and Spain/EU. An interdependence that has benefitted and empowered Morocco, due to the EU and Spanish fear of massive irregular migration flows, terrorism and regional instability. In sum, the role of irregular migration and migration control cooperation has determined the progressive empowerment of Morocco over the years.

Since summer 2015, the refugee crisis has revealed an unprecedented EU dependence on Turkey when trying to tackle migration flows, but also that this dependency and the effective Turkish strategy of using the refugee crisis as a bargaining chip have totally changed the EU-Turkey interdependence framework to the benefit of Turkey. On 18 March 2016, the EU and Turkey reached an agreement on the migration crisis. This agreement is interesting because it is the outcome of a process in which *both* irregular migration *and* refugee protection were made matters of fierce negotiation between the EU and a non-EU neighbour, with broader implications for the respective positions of the negotiating parties. By tracing the bargaining process, it is evident that Turkey has gained considerable leverage from its position as a “gatekeeper” situated between Syria and an increasingly “immigration-averse” and securitised EU (Okyay & Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2016). More importantly, Turkey has progressively reversed the asymmetries of power existing between the two parties by demonstrating the indispensability of its continued commitment to act as gatekeeper vis-à-vis an increasingly fragmented and anxious EU.

Therefore, by carrying out a comparative analysis of different cases of migration control cooperation in the Mediterranean region, it seems that although the EU and the member states are more powerful than their neighbouring countries, most of these neighbours cooperate in order to use irregular migration and their compliance as “geographic rent” to obtain stronger negotiating power.

It is important to remember that cooperation on migration control is a particular field in which the EU has an extraordinary vulnerability because of its dependence on its neighbouring countries (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Each EU neighbouring country uses its own tools, bargaining chips and strategies to exert pressure on the EU in order to turn the outcomes of negotiations in their favour. For example, Gaddafi linked the negotiations on migration control with oil agreements while Morocco linked issues such as the Western Sahara, in order to maximise their benefits. Another strategy can be the exploitation of EU vulnerability and dependence, that is, the EU's inability to stop migration flows without its neighbours' cooperation, which was evident during the refugee crisis when Turkey exploited the urgent EU need to control migration and used it as leverage.

In sum, the comparative analysis of the different cases of migration control cooperation in the Mediterranean (between Spain-Morocco, Italy-Libya, and EU-Turkey), reveals that migration control cooperation cannot be understood merely by analysing the relations between the EU and its neighbourhood countries, but that it requires an analysis of the terms of bilateral relations and taking into account the influence of linkages, interdependence relations and embedded processes between a member state and the neighbouring state. Most studies focus on the EU migration control strategy, overlooking the fact that migrant sending states' compliance mainly depends on the relationship between and interdependence of the third country and the member state. Moreover, sending and transit states do not cooperate because they are persuaded to do so by the superior power and are subject to pressure exercised by the EU member state, but because of a long bargaining process between the two countries in which bilateral, multilateral and geopolitical factors and bargaining strategies all play an important role.

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