

**T.C.
ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**



**OUTSOURCING MIGRATION CONTROL: THE EU-TUNISIA
MOU AND ITS IMPACT ON MIGRANT RIGHTS, REGIONAL
RELATIONS, AND NEOCOLONIAL GOVERNANCE**

MASTER'S THESIS

Dorra BESSAIS

**Department of Political Science and International Relations
Political Science and International Relations Program**

APRIL, 2025

T.C.
ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES



**OUTSOURCING MIGRATION CONTROL: THE EU-TUNISIA
MOU AND ITS IMPACT ON MIGRANT RIGHTS, REGIONAL
RELATIONS, AND NEOCOLONIAL GOVERNANCE**

MASTER'S THESIS

Dorra BESSAIS
(Y2212.110027)

Department of Political Science and International Relations
Political Science and International Relations Program

Thesis Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Hazar VURAL JANE

APRIL, 2025

THESIS EXAM REPORT

Istanbul Aydin University Institute of Graduate Studies Board of Directors
26.02.2025 date and 2025/02 decision no, the thesis of Dorra BESSAIS; whose thesis
defense exam was held on 15.04.2025 before the jury members formed at the
meeting, unanimously* accepted** decision was made.

JURY

1st Member (Thesis Advisor) : Assc. Prof. Dr. Hazar Vural JANE
2nd Member : Assc. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Cem OĞULTÜRK
3rd Member : Assc. Prof. Dr. Hakan Ömer TUNCA

APPROVAL

Istanbul Aydin University Institute of Graduate Studies Board of Directors
..... date and decision no.

(*) Unanimity/Majority vote will be written in writing.

(**) Acceptance decision will be written in writing.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare with the respect that the study of “Outsourcing Migration Control: The EU-Tunisia MoU and its Impact on Migrant Rights, Regional Relations, and Neocolonial Governance”, which I submitted as a Master thesis, is written without any assistance in violation of scientific ethics and traditions in all the processes from the project phase to the conclusion of the thesis and that the works I have benefited from are from those shown in the references. (15/04/2025)

Dorra Bessais

FOREWORD

I want to start by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to my family for their constant support. Their encouragement has been a source of strength for me during tough times, reminding me how vital perseverance and resilience are.

I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Hazar Vural Jane, for being there for me during this process. Your direction and encouragement were critical in the production of this thesis, and I am grateful for your mentorship.

Dr Mehmet Cem Oğultürk , Dr. Murat Jane, Dr. Alihan Limoncuoğlu, and Dr. Hakan Ömer Tunca. They have also made valuable impact on my academic development. Their professionalism and passion have improved my learning experience, they were there whenever I ask for their help, they never fail to encourage me.

This thesis is a reflection of not just my efforts but also the support and influence of those around me. I hope it adds value to the ongoing discussions about migration governance and human rights.

April, 2025

Dorra Bessais

OUTSOURCING MIGRATION CONTROL: THE EU-TUNISIA MOU AND ITS IMPACT ON MIGRANT RIGHTS, REGIONAL RELATIONS, AND NEOCOLONIAL GOVERNANCE

ABSTRACT

The 2023 EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) represents a noteworthy and complex agreement that perpetuates the European Union's strategy of delegating migration management to external nations. Although it is presented as a partnership aimed at fostering economic stability and enhancing border management cooperation, the agreement raises serious concerns regarding its effects on migrant rights, Tunisia's sovereignty, and wider regional relations. This thesis critically analyzes the MoU's strategic goals, implementation methods, and implications, placing it within the broader context of EU migration policies and Tunisia's geopolitical situation.

This research utilizes a mixed-methods framework, combining quantitative data derived from official migration reports with qualitative insights obtained from policy documents, interviews with pivotal stakeholders, and case studies of migrants directly impacted by the execution of the MoU. These case studies offer a detailed look into the lived experiences of migrants in Tunisia, highlighting issues such as arbitrary detention, forced expulsions, and limited access to asylum. The research also delves into the political and economic motivations behind Tunisia's cooperation, illustrating how financial aid and diplomatic pressures influence the country's role as a migration gatekeeper.

In summary, this thesis argues that the EU-Tunisia MoU exemplifies a type of neocolonial governance, wherein migration control is assigned under the guise of economic partnership, frequently at the expense of human rights and regional stability. Beyond its immediate humanitarian implications, the agreement exacerbates Tunisia's economic reliance on the EU while complicating its diplomatic ties with both African and European partners. By examining legal frameworks,

economic dependencies, and the real-life experiences of migrants, this study adds to the ongoing discussions surrounding migration governance, externalized border control, and the changing role of North Africa in European migration strategies.

Keywords: EU-Tunisia MoU, Migration Control, Human Rights, Neocolonialism, Border Externalization, Tunisia-EU Relations, Migration Governance



GÖÇ KONTROLÜNÜN DIŞ KAYNAK KULLANIMI: AB-TUNUS MOU VE GÖÇMEN HAKLARI, BÖLGESEL İLİŞKİLER VE NEOKOLONİAL YÖNETİM ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

ÖZET

2023 AB-Tunus Mutabakat Zaptı (MoU), Avrupa Birliği'nin göç yönetimini dış ülkelere devretme stratejisini sürdüren dikkate değer ve karmaşık bir anlaşmayı temsil etmektedir. Ekonomik istikrarı teşvik etme ve sınır yönetimi iş birliğini geliştirme amacıyla sunulmasına rağmen, anlaşma göçmen hakları, Tunus'un egemenliği ve daha geniş bölgesel ilişkiler üzerindeki etkileri açısından ciddi endişeler doğurmaktadır. Bu tez, MoU'nun stratejik hedeflerini, uygulama yöntemlerini ve sonuçlarını eleştirel bir şekilde analiz ederek, anlaşmayı AB'nin göç politikaları ve Tunus'un jeopolitik konumu bağlamında incelemektedir.

Bu araştırma, resmi göç raporlarından elde edilen nicel verileri; politika belgeleri, kilit paydaşlarla yapılan görüşmeler ve MoU'nun uygulanmasından doğrudan etkilenen göçmenlerin vaka çalışmalarıyla birleştiren karma yöntemler çerçevesini kullanmaktadır. Bu vaka çalışmaları, Tunus'taki göçmenlerin yaşadığı deneyimlere ayrıntılı bir bakış sunarak keyfi gözaltılar, zorla sınır dışı edilmeler ve sığınma erişimindeki kısıtlamalar gibi konulara ışık tutmaktadır. Araştırma ayrıca, Tunus'un iş birliği yapmasının ardındaki siyasi ve ekonomik motivasyonları inceleyerek, mali yardımlar ve diplomatik baskıların ülkenin Avrupa için bir göç kapıcısı (migration gatekeeper) rolü üstlenmesindeki etkisini ortaya koymaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, bu tez, AB-Tunus MoU'sunun göç kontrolünün ekonomik ortaklık adı altında devredildiği, ancak bunun sıklıkla insan hakları ve bölgesel istikrar pahasına gerçekleştiği bir neokolonyal yönetim biçimi olduğunu savunmaktadır. Anlaşma, yalnızca insani sonuçlar doğurmakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda Tunus'un AB'ye ekonomik bağımlılığını artırmakta ve Afrika ile Avrupa arasındaki diplomatik ilişkilerini karmaşık hale getirmektedir. Bu çalışma, hukuki çerçeveleri, ekonomik bağımlılıkları ve göçmenlerin gerçek yaşam deneyimlerini

inceleyerek, göç yönetimi, dışsallaştırılmış sınır kontrolü ve Kuzey Afrika'nın Avrupa'nın göç stratejilerindeki değişen rolü hakkındaki tartışmalara katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: AB-Tunus Mutabakat Zaptı, göç yönetimi, insan hakları, neokolonyalizm, sınır dışsallaştırılması, Tunus-AB ilişkileri, göç yönetimi, vaka çalışmaları



TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
FOREWORD.....	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ÖZET.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xi
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Background	1
B. Purpose and Importance	2
C. Research Questions	3
1. The Main Research Question.....	3
2. Research Sub-questions:	4
D. The Main Argument.....	4
E. Methodology	5
F. Literature Review.....	5
G. Barriers and Limitations of Research:	9
H. Order of Study.....	10
II. GEOPOLITICAL MOTIVATIONS AND STRATEGIC INTERESTS	12
A. Tunisia-EU Relations: A Legacy of Dependence and Strategic Cooperation 12	
1. Historical Foundations of EU-Tunisia Relations	12
2. Economic Challenges and Trade Imbalances	13
B. Evolution of EU-Tunisia Relations:.....	15
C. European Union Perspective:.....	16
1. The Migration-Terrorism Nexus and Securitization of Migration:.....	16
2. Fortress Europe: Historical Foundations and Policy Justifications:	16
3. The EU-Tunisia MoU: Migration Control as a Strategic Priority:	17
4. EU Internal Divisions: Political Disagreements on Migration Governance: .	
.....	18

5. The Externalization of EU Border Controls: Tunisia's Role as a Migration Gatekeeper.....	19
6. The EU's Broader Geopolitical Strategy in North Africa:.....	20
D. Tunisian Perspective	21
1. Economic Challenges and the Need for Financial Assistance	21
2. Trade Relations: Opportunities and Structural Barriers.....	21
3. Migration Management: A Strategic Bargaining Tool for Tunisia.....	22
4. Green Energy Transition: A Long-Term Economic Strategy	22
III. KEY PROVISIONS OF THE EU-TUNISIA MOU MIGRATION	
CONTROL	24
A. Border Control and Anti-Smuggling Measures	24
B. Frontex and Tunisia: Expanding EU Border Surveillance and Rising Ethical concerns: Pushbacks, surveillance, and human rights violations.....	24
C. Migrant Returns: Tunisians and Non-Tunisians	26
D. Assistance for Search and Rescue Operations and the Establishment of Tunisia's Maritime Search and Rescue Region (SRR).....	26
E. Legal Migration Pathways: The Truth of this Promise.....	28
1. The MoU's Legal Migration and Talent Partnerships	28
2. Previous Legal Migration Initiatives & Their Limits	28
3. The Reality of Visa Policies: A Barrier, not a Solution.....	30
4. Outsourcing of Visa Processing & Discriminatory Practices	30
IV. IMPACT ON MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN TUNISIA	32
A. Tunisian Migration Context	32
B. The Situation of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Tunisia.....	32
C. Lack of Asylum Infrastructure in Tunisia: UNHCR's Limited Role and EU's Outsourcing of Asylum Processing.....	33
D. Human Rights Violations.....	34
1. Democratic Decline and Authoritarianism.....	34
2. Discrimination and Violence Against Migrants and Refugees	34
3. Tunisia's Crackdown on Migrants.....	35
4. Inhumane Treatment of Migrants.....	36
5. Cases of Violence, Torture, and Sexual Assault Against Sub-Saharan Migrants in Tunisia	37
6. Decline of Civil Liberties and Exacerbation of Existing Issues	40

7.	Response from International Organizations	41
E.	The Marginalization of Black Communities & Racial Discrimination:	42
1.	Historical Context: Tunisia's Abolition of Slavery	42
2.	Racial Discrimination and Legal Gap	43
3.	Economic and Social Exclusion of Black Tunisians & Sub-Saharan Migrants	44
F.	MoU's Impact on Migrants' Rights (Accountability, Third-Nationals, Civil Society)	45
G.	Challenges and Restrictions Faced by Civil Society Organizations and Activists	46
H.	Role of Civil Society Organizations in Tunisia	49
I.	The EU's Responsibility and Accountability in Migration Governance	51
1.	The Shift from Humanitarianism to Securitization.....	51
2.	The Outsourcing Dilemma: Ethics vs. Political Interests	52
3.	The Role of Far-Right Politics in Shaping EU Migration Policy	53
4.	Selective Migration Policies in Hungary	55
5.	Italy's Hardline Stance on Migration and its Impact on Migrant Rights ...	55
J.	The EU-Tunisia MoU in the Global Migration Externalization Strategy.....	56
1.	Comparative Cases of EU Externalization: The Italy-Albania Protocol (2023): A Case Study	56
a.	Legal and human rights considerations, economic and political motivations.....	57
2.	The EU-Libya MoU (2017 Renewed 2023): A Case Study	58
a.	Legal and human rights considerations, economic and political motivations.....	58
K.	Impact on Global South Countries	59
V.	Regional and broader Impact of the MoU	60
A.	Tunisia's Position in the African Union.....	60
B.	Lack of Institutional Mechanisms in Sub-Saharan Africa	61
C.	Potential Fragmentation in North African Cooperation.....	61
1.	Perspectives of Algeria and Libya	62
2.	Cooperative Security Efforts and Regional Stability	64
D.	Ethical Concerns and Funding Transparency	64
E.	Italy-Tunisia Migration Relations: A History of Cooperation and Tensions.	65

1.	Evolution of Italy-Tunisia Agreements on Migration.....	65
2.	Detention Centers and Human Rights Violations	66
3.	Local and Civil Society Responses	67
F.	Impact on Tunisia’s Governance & Migration Policy	68
1.	Institutional and Policy Shifts: Executive Control and Civil Society Exclusion.....	68
2.	Socio-Economic Strain and Dependence on the EU.....	68
G.	Neocolonialism and Power Asymmetry in the EU-Tunisian MoU	69
1.	Historical Context of Colonialism	69
2.	Post-Colonial Legacies and Development Challenges	70
3.	Economic Dependency.....	71
4.	Impact on vulnerable groups.....	72
5.	Understanding Neocolonialism in International Relations	73
6.	The MoU as a Soft Power Instrument of EU Influence	75
H.	Long-Term Potential Consequences	76
1.	Economic Impact and the Risk of Dependency	76
2.	Human Rights and Accountability Concerns.....	76
3.	Geopolitical Pressures and Tunisia’s Sovereignty	77
4.	The Security-Migration Nexus: Risks of Militarization, Repeating Previous Mistakes	78
VI.	CONCLUSION.....	80
VII.	REFERENCES.....	85
	RESUME.....	98

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	: African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States
AMU	: Arab Maghreb Union
AU	: African Union
CEAS	: Common European Asylum System
CSO	: Civil Society Organization
DCFTA	: Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
ECHR	: European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	: European Court of Human Rights
ENP	: European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	: European Union
EUAA	: European Union Agency for Asylum (formerly EASO – European Asylum Support Office)
Frontex	: European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GCM	: Global Compact for Migration
HRW	: Human Rights Watch
ICCPR	: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ILO	: International Labour Organization
IMF	: International Monetary Fund
IOM	: International Organization for Migration
IOM	: International Organization for Migration
MENA	: Middle East and North Africa

MoU	: Memorandum of Understanding
MP	: Mobility Partnership
NGO	: Non-Governmental Organization
OHCHR	: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UDHR	: Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNHCR	: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WB	: World Bank



I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Historically, human mobility has been essential for survival, advancement, and the quest for an improved existence. Migration is not just a response to crisis but an inherent aspect of human nature, shaped by the need for security, opportunity, and knowledge. For those facing conflict, persecution, or economic hardship, the right to seek safety and a dignified future is not a privilege but a fundamental human right. Restricting this right, particularly for the most vulnerable, undermines the principles of justice and human dignity that international law seeks to uphold.

Migration governance has emerged as a fundamental aspect of the European Union's (EU) foreign policy, especially in its interactions with neighboring regions. The relationship between the EU and Tunisia, built on a long-standing history of economic, political, and strategic connections, exemplifies this focus on migration control. Tunisia shares maritime borders with Italy through the islands of Sicily and Sardinia to the north, approximately 150 km away, and Malta to the east, which makes it a crucial partner in the Mediterranean. Due to its strategic position, Tunisia plays a significant role in Europe's externalization policies, which involve delegating migration management responsibilities to third countries. However, these policies have sparked serious concerns regarding potential human rights abuses and the diminishing of civil liberties.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the EU and Tunisia in July 2023 represents a critical development in this relationship. Framed as a partnership to address irregular migration, the agreement aligns closely with European interests in securing borders and limiting migration flows toward its shores. It includes provisions for financial assistance, technical support, and cooperation on border management. However, the MoU largely overlooks the socio-political realities in Tunisia, where economic challenges and political instability result in a decline in the living standards of Tunisians and a deterioration of public

services. This has been accompanied by a marginalization of the role of political bodies and oversight institutions, while the role of the head of the executive authority and the state bureaucratic apparatus has been exaggerated. In addition to the restriction of public freedoms and the spread of a climate of suspicion and fear.

The agreement has faced criticism for its emphasis on border securitization at the expense of migrant rights and protections. Mechanisms such as increased patrols, interception operations, and expedited deportations are prioritized, while meaningful safeguards for migrants' rights are absent. Furthermore, the classification processes inherent in EU migration policies distinguishing "legitimate" refugees from so-called "economic migrants" exacerbate the vulnerability of individuals, particularly Tunisians, many of whom are subjected to detention and deportation without adequate legal recourse.

Beyond its impact on migrants, the MoU has contributed to the growing marginalization of civil society organizations and activists in Tunisia. Legal and administrative restrictions, coupled with government intimidation, have severely hampered the ability of these groups to advocate for human rights and hold policymakers accountable. The EU's continued financial and political support for Tunisia, despite these conditions, signals a willingness to overlook democratic backsliding and human rights abuses in pursuit of migration control objectives and face the accusation of being complicit by legitimizing the authorities and its actions.

B. Purpose and Importance

The purpose of this lies in its potential to illuminate the complexities surrounding the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and its broader implications for migration policy and human rights. This thesis critically examines the geopolitical motivations and strategic interests underlying the MoU, exploring how the agreement prioritizes European interests while disregarding fundamental human rights. It highlights the perpetuation of restrictions on civil society and the externalization of border control responsibilities to Tunisia, a country facing its own governance and economic challenges. By analyzing the provisions of the MoU and the broader EU-Tunisia relationship, this research sheds light on the implications of such agreements for migration governance and regional stability, emphasizing the need for accountability in promoting equitable and rights-based policies.

Additionally, the study addresses the concerning decline in civil liberties and freedom of expression in Tunisia, which intersects with issues of migration governance and human rights protection.

This study investigates the MoU's terms and implementation, demonstrating how the pact reinforces border externalization policies by shifting Europe's migratory duties to Tunisia. This country is already dealing with political instability, economic hardships, and rising restrictions on civil society. Such a move not only places a major strain on Tunisia, but it also exacerbates human rights breaches, particularly against migrants, asylum seekers, and vulnerable populations.

This study dives into the troubling deterioration of civil rights and freedom of expression in Tunisia, demonstrating how these democratic defeats are linked to the greater context of migration governance. It emphasizes that, rather than creating genuine cooperation, such agreements may increase power inequalities and perpetuate neocolonial dependency.

By bringing these essential concerns to light, this thesis hopes to deepen policy discussions and inform decision-makers, civil society organizations, and academics on the pressing need for migration policies that promote human dignity and responsibility. In an era when global migration issues are becoming increasingly politicized, this study aims to assess the EU's role as a self-proclaimed champion of human rights, examining whether its external agreements are consistent with its professed democratic values or if they undermine them. Finally, this study aims to advocate for more ethical, transparent, and rights-based approaches to migration governance that respect partner nations' sovereignty while safeguarding the rights and freedoms of those most affected.

C. Research Questions

1. The Main Research Question

- What are the key geopolitical motivations behind the Memorandum of Understanding between the European Union and Tunisia, and how does it impact Tunisia's civil society, border control responsibilities, and regional stability?

2. Research Sub-questions:

- What are the policy implications and outcomes of the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding for migration management and border security?
- To what extent does the EU-Tunisia MOU contribute to strengthening Tunisian institutions for border governance and migration management?
- Does the EU-Tunisia MOU effectively address the root causes of irregular migration and propose solutions for facilitating legal migration, particularly in the context of the EU's restrictive visa policies toward North African countries?
- How does the MoU impact human rights for migrants in Tunisia?
- How did the civil society and the international organizations react to this MOU?
- What are the potential long-term consequences of this agreement for the protection of human rights in Tunisia?

D. The Main Argument

This thesis proposes that the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) serves as a mechanism for the European Union to delegate migration management responsibilities to Tunisia, frequently at the expense of migrants' rights and humanitarian ideals. Through a critical evaluation of this agreement, the researchers will discover how it not only demonstrates the EU's intention to strengthen border security, but also strengthens neocolonial connections and economic reliance in Tunisia. This viewpoint creates serious ethical concerns, as prioritizing national security over human rights can lead to the marginalization of vulnerable communities. Finally, this thesis tries to shed light on the MoU's broader implications, exploring its impact on regional dynamics and calling into question the EU's commitment to upholding international human rights norms in migratory problems.

E. Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative approaches, in addition to case studies, will be employed to analyze and understand the goals of the MOU, its impact on both the European Union and Tunisia, and the challenges it poses in addressing human rights standards. The quantitative approach will focus on collecting and analyzing data from official sources, such as governmental and international organizations, as well as published reports, to assess changes in migration dynamics that necessitated the signing of the agreement. The qualitative approach will involve a detailed examination of the agreement's documents, a comparative analysis of reports and scholarly articles, and interviews with key stakeholders, including migrants, government officials, and policymakers involved in the MOU's implementation. This combined methodology aims to provide a holistic understanding of the dynamics of migratory governance between the EU and Tunisia, offering extensive insights into its geopolitical and socio-political implications. In addition to case study of detention centers and the deportation cases of returned migrants from EU countries to Tunisia, it will also examine where and how Tunisia deported them. This will provide a more concrete evaluation of the MoU implementation and whether it aligns with international human rights standards. The case study will be the comparison between two agreements and MOUs to examine the motivation and interests behind implementing them as tools of externalization strategy.

F. Literature Review

The topic of migration has always been a pillar of research and discussion by academics, researchers, and also politicians. It encompasses countries and policies at the international level. Jean-Pierre Cassarino, in his analysis of the European Union-Tunisia relationship, emphasized the need for a coherent partnership to manage migration and cooperate on readmission agreements. This research examines whether the EU and Tunisia are genuinely addressing the root causes of migration or merely implementing short-term solutions. The relationship between these two entities is often complex and questionable. Migration is not a recent phenomenon; it is a longstanding issue whose underlying causes should have already been tackled. The agreements between the EU and Tunisia, as Cassarino suggested, should be built on not only coherent cooperation but also a deep understanding of Tunisia's challenges

and the impacts of migration on both local communities and migrants. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has significantly affected Tunisian society and economy, exacerbating issues like racism and discrimination against migrants. Policies stemming from the MOU appear to encourage these trends by giving the responsibility of migration control to Tunisia. Furthermore, Mastorillo (2020) asserts that this strategy mirrors historical patterns of colonialism, prioritizing the EU interests over Tunisia's development. The strategy of externalization of the European borders to Tunisia to bear the burden of the increasing migration flows dates back to the 1980s. Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2009) describe this strategy as a form of "remote control." In a similar vein, Gabrielli (2016) points out that externalization policies are crafted to protect European states from legal and political repercussions, shifting the responsibility onto nations like Tunisia, Libya, and Turkey. The dual nature of Tunisia's position is well documented by Boubakri (2013) and Fargues (2017) because the country is a source of migration and also supports EU migration policies.

Other researchers, such as Cassarino (2018), contend that although the EU frames these agreements as collaborative partnerships, they often turn out to be imbalanced arrangements that reinforce unequal power dynamics. His work stresses that genuine cooperation on migration should be rooted in shared interests and a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by transit countries, rather than unilateral enforcement strategies imposed by the EU. However, Sha'ath and Raach (2024), they claim that Tunisia uses a pragmatic, interest-driven approach to asylum and readmission, carefully balancing geopolitical goals with domestic capacity constraints. Their research focuses on how Tunisia strategically navigates EU demands while emphasizing its own policy independence.

In addition to the legal and political dimensions of externalization, researchers like Andersson (2014) and Collyer (2016) examine the securitization of migration, suggesting that the EU increasingly perceives migration as a security threat rather than a humanitarian concern. This change has resulted in the militarization of borders, heightened surveillance, and restrictive migration policies that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including asylum seekers and refugees.

Tunisia's strategic location has positioned it as a crucial partner in EU

migration governance. Its dual function as a nation of emigration and a migratory gatekeeper, tasked with keeping migrants from entering Europe, is paradoxical. Fargues (2017) and Boubakri (2013) draw attention to Tunisia's long history of migratory cooperation with the EU, noting that the EU has sought to outsource border control tasks to North African countries since the 1980s through diplomatic pressure and financial incentives. A number of academics, such as Ben Jelloul (2022) and Achilli (2020), contend that political instability and economic dependency have a significant impact on Tunisia's compliance with EU migration laws. Like previous migratory accords, the MOU strengthens Tunisia's reliance on EU money, making it more difficult for the nation to create an independent migration strategy. Additionally, research by Natter (2021) underscores how Tunisia's internal challenges—such as high unemployment, weak governance, and political unrest further complicate its involvement in EU migration policy.

Additionally, the study will investigate the EU's evolving migration policies, which have undergone significant changes after years of debate among member states. Some countries continue to resist the new policies, creating internal divisions within the EU. This dynamic impacts the EU's overall strategy for migration management. The research will analyze the continuity between the MOU and the EU's broader migration policy, which frequently relies on financial agreements with third countries to prevent migrants from reaching Europe. This approach will be critically evaluated to provide a comprehensive overview of migration policies in Europe and their implications for third-country relations. The role of international and regional actors will also be addressed to understand their influence on shaping these policies.

Beyond economic and political factors, Alami M'Charek et al. (2021) and Hibou (2019) look at how migration externalization influences societal sentiments about migrants in Tunisia. The implementation of EU-supported migration controls has spurred rising anti-migrant sentiment, racial discrimination, and violent expulsions, notably among Sub-Saharan African migrants. These studies highlight the intricate relationship between migration policies and societal attitudes.

There is an increasing quantity of research into the humanitarian consequences of migration externalization. Frelick et al. (2016) and Amnesty International (2023) describe how these policies imprison migrants in transit nations,

subjecting them to incarceration, abuse, and limited access to refuge. Furthermore, reports from Human Rights Watch (2023) and UNHCR (2022) have voiced concerns about forced deportations and maltreatment of migrants under the EU-Tunisia MoU, stating that these agreements violate international human rights norms.

While some researchers, such as Geddes and Hadj-Abdou (2018), believe that migration control policies can effectively reduce irregular migration, others, such as Sicakkan (2020), argue that these strategies fail to address the root causes of migration, driving migrants down more dangerous and irregular paths. The situation in Libya is a particularly instructive illustration. Hernandez-Carretero and Carling (2012) demonstrate how the EU-Libya MoU resulted in substantial human rights breaches, with migrants subjected to forced labor, arbitrary imprisonment, and inhumane treatment. By juxtaposing these outcomes with Tunisia's changing migratory dynamics, this thesis highlights the possible risks and consequences of outsourcing border control to a politically unstable country like Tunisia.

Despite the substantial literature on EU migration policies, this thesis presents a more comprehensive and critical examination of the MoU between the EU and Tunisia by addressing many significant gaps in existing research.

Most research focuses on Tunisia in isolation. This study uses comparative analysis to investigate trends, inconsistencies, and variations in EU migrant externalization across contexts.

While scholars have examined Tunisia's migration role, this paper investigates how the MoU contributes to domestic instability, such as increased xenophobia, economic dependency, and political tensions.

This study expressly characterizes the MoU as a neocolonial governance tool, examining how financial aid and diplomatic pressure strengthen European dominance in migration control. Role of International and Regional Actors. In addition to EU policies, this study investigates how international organizations (UNHCR, IOM) and regional groups (African Union, Arab League) interact with Tunisia's migration governance, a feature that is frequently disregarded in previous research.

G. Barriers and Limitations of Research:

Some government officials and even organizations refused to provide insights to researchers and journalists, limiting access to critical information. Additionally, some migrants I reached out to agree to share their experiences but refused to have their names published due to fear, given their precarious situation in Tunisia. Since the MoU is still in effect, any modifications to its provisions could impact its implementation, making a final evaluation a little critical. Furthermore, official reports often present a one-sided perspective, emphasizing successes and positive outcomes rather than offering a more balanced or critical assessment. Besides, some outdated statistics or even some data are not available or reliable.

Researching the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) presents several significant problems, particularly given the sensitive nature of the topic and the current political atmosphere surrounding migratory governance. A major impediment has been limited access to key stakeholders, since certain government officials, policymakers, and representatives from international organizations have either refused to share their ideas or provided ambiguous answers. This hesitance is frequently motivated by political sensitivities, bureaucratic constraints, or concerns about public perception, complicating efforts to acquire clear and extensive information regarding the decision-making processes involved in the MoU's implementation.

Migrants and asylum seekers, profoundly affected by this agreement, often face intimidation, legal ambiguities, and the looming threat of deportation. Although some individuals agreed to share their stories, many chose not to have their names disclosed due to fears for their safety or worries about possible retaliation. Their vulnerable legal status in Tunisia, coupled with the growing hostility towards migrants, makes it even more challenging to collect comprehensive first-hand accounts. This limitation hinders the depth of qualitative analysis, as certain experiences go underreported because of security concerns.

A considerable difficulty resides in the dynamic characteristics of the MoU itself. As it remains active, any alterations to its terms or changes in political circumstances could influence its execution, rendering any conclusive assessment provisional and likely to evolve. Moreover, official reports and government

statements frequently present a skewed perspective, highlighting successes and policy accomplishments while minimizing humanitarian issues and human rights abuses. This selective narrative creates a disconnect between official rhetoric and the actual situation, necessitating that researcher turn to alternative sources, independent inquiries, and personal accounts to develop a more comprehensive analysis.

The accessibility and dependability of data pose a significant challenge. Outdated statistics, insufficient disaggregated data, and inconsistencies in migration figures make it difficult to accurately assess the impact of the MoU. In certain instances, migration data is politicized, with figures being manipulated or selectively presented to support policy decisions. The lack of comprehensive, independently verified reports on detentions, deportations, and human rights abuses adds to the complexity of the research process, necessitating reliance on NGOs, investigative journalism, and international organizations to bridge the gaps.

Despite these challenges, this research is committed to illuminating the complexities of migration governance, rigorously assessing the EU-Tunisia MoU, and amplifying the perspectives of those most impacted. By integrating various sources, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and including case studies from comparable agreements, this study aims to address these obstacles and enhance our understanding of migration externalization policies.

H. Order of Study

The first chapter is dedicated to an introduction to migration as a geopolitical issue and an overview of the European Union's Tunisia relations. It presents background information to establish the context of the study, emphasizing its significance and purpose within the field of international relations. This is achieved by analyzing the complex nature of the relationships between the two actors and their broader implications. The first chapter also outlines the main research question and sub-questions that guide the study. Furthermore, the methodology employed in this research is explained to provide clarity on how the study was conducted and how data was collected and analyzed. A literature review is the previous studies and

The second chapter is providing a further step toward analyzing the study, explaining more the context of the MoU and analyzing the geopolitical motivations

and strategic motivations of both the EU and Tunisia behind creating and implication of agreements on the international level. Diving into the historical roots of the EU-Tunisia relations and its dynamic through their first agreement until the establishment of MoU.

The third chapter presents the key provisions related to migration control by presenting the framework of the MOU and its implications. analyze the commitments expressed by each party to control he borders and fight smuggling and migrant returns and the creation and assistance in the search and rescue operations. In addition to assessing the legal migration pathways proposed by the EU, funding, and financial and technical support, this chapter will critically evaluate whether the agreement offers genuine alternatives to irregular migration or merely reinforces restrictive policies.

The fourth chapter focuses on the impact and consequences of the MOU on migrants, especially those from sub-Saharan African in Tunisia. and also how the racial violence affects even black Tunisians, not only migrants. This chapter highlights how the MOU exacerbated the human rights situation, which was already deteriorating. Case studies are exposed, including detentions and deportations to the borders desert. the MOU control policies relate to human rights and exacerbate the violent practices against them, and it examines the responsibility of the EU in worsening the situation by adopting far rights policies.

The fifth chapter examines how the MOU influences migration governance at a regional level and Tunisia's position as a Mediterranean and African country with its neighboring countries. The chapter examines the potential long-term consequences of the EU on Tunisia and the region.

The last part will be dedicated to the conclusion, the findings and recommendations.

II. GEOPOLITICAL MOTIVATIONS AND STRATEGIC INTERESTS

A. Tunisia-EU Relations: A Legacy of Dependence and Strategic Cooperation

1. Historical Foundations of EU-Tunisia Relations

Tunisia has a long history of relations with the EU. It was first a Roman colony and then colonized by France in 1881 (Murphy, 2016). Even after gaining independence in 1956, Tunisia's economic institutions and dependence on France remained. The idea of Europe as a symbol of progress and prosperity has been ingrained since the colonial era, when European nations gained wealth through the exploitation of colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. As a former French colony, Tunisia underwent significant political, economic, and cultural changes under colonial rule. European powers dominated trade, agriculture, and governance, leaving Tunisia economically reliant on Europe. This pattern is evident in most post-colonial African countries, where inadequate economic structures, financial burdens, and political instability were left behind by European colonizers. The power dynamics established during the colonial period continue to shape modern international trade.

The establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1976 marked the beginning of formal diplomatic and economic relations between the EU and Tunisia. The 1995 Association Agreement, remains the legal foundation for the EU-Tunisian partnership to this day. The agreement was signed as part of the broader Barcelona Process, which aimed to strengthen relations with Mediterranean countries. As a result, Tunisia's migration policy has been heavily influenced by its relationships with EU member states, leading to a focus on functionality and security rather than human rights. This allowed Ben Ali's dictatorship to develop and internalize international migration policies in order to maintain its authority and increase surveillance over the population. The 1995 agreement also established a free trade area for industrial goods and a partnership in political, economic, social, and

scientific areas. Tunisia was the first partner in the EU's Southern Neighborhood.

In 1998, the first meeting of the EU-Tunisia Association Council was held, marking the formal launch of the implementation of the Association Agreement. This agreement provides a forum for social and political discussion and specifies priority areas for collaboration, including limiting immigration into Europe. In 2009, the Bilateral Protocol on the Establishment of a Dispute Settlement Mechanism between the EU and Tunisia was signed. After the Tunisian revolution 2010 2011, the EU shifted its policy and recognized the obligation to support the democratic transition by emphasizing political reforms alongside economic assistance. As part of this effort, the EU launched the SPRING program, offering additional funding of €350 million for the Southern neighborhood in 2011 and 2012. After the revolution, Tunisia demonstrated its commitment to align with EU priorities in order to continue their relations.

2. Economic Challenges and Trade Imbalances

However, the relationship between Tunisia and the EU has also been marked by contestation and disagreement. The Tunisian government has faced criticism for its handling of the economy, as the country is currently facing significant economic challenges such as high inflation, a large debt-to-GDP ratio, and slow growth. The free trade agreement between Tunisia and the EU has not been beneficial to Tunisia and has actually had a negative impact on the Tunisian economy. This is due to the fact that the consequences of trade diversion outweigh the effects of trade creation. In other words, the country is experiencing import losses because European goods are being imported through Tunisia at EU pricing, while goods from other parts of the world are being imported at lower international prices. This is largely due to tax breaks that allow European goods to enter the Tunisian market at the expense of cheaper products from other regions. The government's response to these economic challenges has been viewed as inadequate, leading to widespread discontent and protests among the Tunisian people. In an effort to support Tunisia's economic reform program, the EU has been involved in initiatives through the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, the government's refusal to implement certain reforms has caused tensions with the EU and the IMF. The EU has been critical of these developments and has called for the restoration of democratic norms and institutions in Tunisia. Additionally, the EU has also been working to address the

migration crisis from Tunisia, as the country has become a major departure point for migrants seeking to reach Italy and other European countries.

The Mobility Partnership between the EU and Tunisia was signed in 2014 as part of the wider EU agenda aimed at strengthening collaboration with North African nations on migration, particularly given the rising migratory challenges in the Mediterranean area. Critics argue that it places an unequal burden on Tunisia to manage migration without offering sufficient benefits, such as greater access to legal migration opportunities or substantial development aid.

The European Union has invited Tunisia to discuss a new free trade agreement, referred to as the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). This agreement would encompass all key sectors crucial for Tunisia's economic growth, including agriculture, energy, and services. However, negotiations have been put on hold due to resistance from civil society, which argues that the agreement lacks transparency and could harm vulnerable Tunisian industries. Additionally, there are concerns about Tunisia's weak institutional and legal framework to manage the readmitted TCNs (Tunisian Citizens Returning). Specifically, the absence of an official regularization policy and voluntary return programs raises issues. Furthermore, worries about the social and economic effects of accommodating a growing number of migrants are prevalent, especially amid a significant economic crisis and ongoing social and political changes.

In 2020, during the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to this agreement and expressed its intention to renew it through an economic and investment plan that addresses the new challenges faced by southern countries. Tunisia received macro-financial assistance (MFA) from the EU to help navigate the economic difficulties that arose after its transition began following the 2011 revolution, as well as to recover from the terrorist attacks that impacted its tourism sector. As part of the €3 billion emergency MFA package in response to the pandemic, Tunisia was allocated €600 million. Notably, it was the only African and Arab nation to take part in Horizon 2020, which advanced science and technology, enabling Tunisian researchers to collaborate on equal footing with their counterparts from EU member states. Tunisia's involvement highlights its strategic significance to the EU and its dedication to fostering innovation and research in the MENA region. The EU has demonstrated its commitment to

contributing to the economic recovery plan to support its partners. the EU is the largest foreign investor in Tunisia, making up 85% of the country's foreign direct investment (FDI) stock, which accounted for 0.5% of the EU's total trade with the world in 2022 (European Commission, 2022).

This connection has been further reinforced by Tunisia's recent democratic and liberal reforms has undertaken in recent years, particularly following the 2011 including creation of democratic institutions and processes, constitutional reform freedom of speech and improved its human rights record by complying to international norms and corresponds. but Tunisia faced difficulties in applying these reforms because of the economic crisis that has persisted since 2011, the political instability and the several governments changes and inability to realize the revolution demands. Corruption in both public and private sectors, the independent struggle of the judicial system, high unemployment and regional inequalities remain with rural and interior areas falling behind the coastlines in terms of development and infrastructure. Public debt and fiscal deficits have limited the government's ability to invest in infrastructure and public services.

The European Union continues to provide financial support to Tunisia, particularly in the context of migration and economic reforms. In March 2024, the EU allocated €150 million to support the country's macroeconomic reforms, aimed at stabilizing its public finances. In addition, an initiative launched in June 2024, involving the EU, the European Investment Bank, and the French Development Agency, foresees an investment of €270.9 million to support Tunisian micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. In parallel, EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in July 2023 addresses the management of migration flows, although concerns have been raised by NGOs regarding migration management practices in Tunisia.

B. Evolution of EU-Tunisia Relations:

The relationship between the EU and Tunisia showcases a careful balance between advocating for democratic values and pursuing strategic geopolitical goals. The recently signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) marks a notable change in the EU's stance towards Tunisia. Unlike past agreements, this MOU seems to place greater emphasis on EU strategic interests rather than on promoting democracy

and upholding human rights. The EU's main objective has been to curb irregular migration by delegating border control responsibilities to neighboring countries, including Tunisia. In return, Tunisia benefits from financial aid and technical support aimed at enhancing its border security and monitoring systems. While this partnership highlights the EU's strategic necessity to tackle migration issues, it has drawn criticism for neglecting the promotion of democratic principles and human rights, which were once fundamental aspects of EU-Tunisia collaboration.

A key distinction between the MOU and previous agreements, such as the 1995 Association Agreement, is found in their legal structures. The Association Agreement was a formal and legally binding treaty, ratified through the EU's institutional processes, which included parliamentary oversight and judicial review. In contrast, the MOU is an informal, non-binding arrangement that circumvented these procedures, being directly negotiated between the European Commission and the Tunisian government. This approach raises concerns about the EU's dedication to transparency and accountability in its interactions with Tunisia.

C. European Union Perspective:

1. The Migration-Terrorism Nexus and Securitization of Migration:

The migration-terrorism nexus presents in both Tunisian and European discourses has further reinforced security approaches on both sides of the Mediterranean. The former Tunisian president Ben Ali was considered as an ally in the trade agreements and in fighting migration and terrorism. The EU usually link irregular migration to terrorism, a very debatable and complex contested issue. Migrants from Tunisia and other parts of North Africa are often portrayed as threats to Europe's cultural and political cohesion since the Mediterranean is framed as a zone of crisis rather than as a bridge between regions. Europe's boundaries are not merely geographic but also deeply cultural, political, and ideological. Christianity, modernity, democracy, and economic development.

2. Fortress Europe: Historical Foundations and Policy Justifications:

After World War II, Europe aimed to rebuild its economies, stabilize the region politically, and prevent further conflicts. However, in this context, the economic protectionism of the European Economic Community (EEC) was criticized

for prioritizing its interests over global trade liberalization. The Industrial Revolution and subsequent economic growth in Europe reinforced the perception of Africa as a resource-rich continent. It is crucial to acknowledge that much of the wealth generated during this period depended fundamentally on the exploitation of African resources and labor. European powers established systems that favored their own interests, often at the expense of African development. After gaining independence, many African nations found themselves grappling with inadequate economic structures, heavy financial debts, and political instability.

Consequently, Africa is frequently portrayed as a continent in perpetual crisis marked by poverty, political turmoil, conflict, and environmental challenges. This narrow narrative overlooks the rich diversity and potential of African countries, reducing the continent to merely a source of migrants seeking refuge or better opportunities. Such a perspective fails to recognize the complexities of migration and the historical contexts that have shaped the current landscape.

The depiction of Africa as underprivileged and Europe as rich supports restrictive migration policy. These measures are presented as vital to keep Europe's resources and social institutions from becoming overrun. This strategy ignores migrants' contributions to host cultures and economies, creating a cycle of exclusion and inequality. It symbolizes the securitized, exclusionary approach to migration that contrasts with the EU's stated values of solidarity, human rights, and openness. During the 1990s the Dublin agreement was criticized too for the unfair responsibilities' distribution between EU states, this regulation reinforces the "Fortress Europe" narrative prioritizing containment over solidarity, leaving frontline states overwhelmed and migrants stuck in precarious conditions. Today the term is a powerful metaphor in debates on migration policy and Europe's role in global migration governance. The memorandum of understanding embodies the "Fortress Europe" limiting irregular migration but also protecting legal avenues for the movement of workers and refugees.

3. The EU-Tunisia MoU: Migration Control as a Strategic Priority:

Legal pathways are also advertised for economic migrants in certain sectors of the economy, which reflects the demand for migrants in the markets. Inside the EU there is no consensus on the migration issue. According to populists and other

right-wing parties, migration risks national security, culture, and welfare systems, leading to the loss of cultural traditions and societal values.

The belief that irregular migrants endanger European national identity is a complex issue that frequently reflects anxieties based on political, cultural, and social factors. The notion that Europe needs to protect its resources arise from a fear of being inundated by migrants who are seen as economic burden. By portraying migrants primarily as economic burdens or threats, this perspective dehumanizes them, stripping away their identities as individuals with rights, aspirations, and stories. Such a reductionist view not only undermines the complexity of migration dynamics but also hinders the development of holistic policies that address the root causes of migration, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by both migrants and host countries.

This viewpoint characterizes migration as a zero-sum scenario, where resources are limited and must be protected. Such anxieties often result in stringent migration policies, including heightened border controls, the establishment of detention facilities, and partnerships with transit nations like Tunisia aimed at curbing migrants' access to Europe. This impression is influenced by a variety of issues, including the politicization of migration, worries about cultural integration, economic concerns, and national security fears. The images of migrants crossing from North Africa-mostly Tunisia-are seized upon by both media and political rhetoric as a threat to European cultural and political stability, reinforcing exclusionary and growing the pressure on Tunisia to sign such agreements.

4. EU Internal Divisions: Political Disagreements on Migration Governance:

EU member states perspectives toward migration vary significantly, with some exhibited openness, like as Sweden and Germany when Chancellor Angela Merkel adopted an open-door policy, and others, such as Hungary and Poland, refused to welcome migrants especially during 2015 crisis, a massive migratory flow from the Middle East reached the Mediterranean shores, the EU opened an investigation after reporting migrant pushback in Croatia and made by several countries to get rid of the migrants.

This crisis exposed tensions among member states. Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic have refused to accept refugees under the EU's relocation system. Hungary refused to accept their share of 120,000 asylum seekers who landed in Italy and Greece. In April 2020, the European Court of Justice found that these states violated EU law by refusing to comply with the relocation process. It also finds Poland and the Czech Republic guilty of failing to meet their duties under an earlier Council decision involving 40,000 migrants. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has positioned himself as a champion of "Christian Europe," using migration as a rallying cry to push nationalist policies.

Migration-related worries are regularly used also in electoral campaigns by conservative or nationalist parties such as France's National Rally and Italy's Lega. Hungary and Poland's ongoing opposition to the European Union's migration policy, particularly the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, generated a split within the EU. Back to 2018 Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki claims that his government already accept migrants from Ukraine and won't accept those from North Africa or the Middle East despite mandatory EU quotas. This raises a question about the selection of migrants and the European vision towards non-European. In framing migration as a problem originating solely from Africa, the discourse tends to obscure Europe's complicity in shaping the very conditions that drive migration. This narrative diverts attention from critical factors such as economic exploitation and climate change, which are often rooted in historical and ongoing practices.

In addition, both states implemented strict migration policies to secure their borders from illegal migrants. They want to be independent from the EU's decisions and implementation, considering that the EU is not addressing the challenges they are facing, furthermore they built a resistance bloc in the EU against the migration policies.

5. The Externalization of EU Border Controls: Tunisia's Role as a Migration Gatekeeper

To get off some pressure, The European Union has successfully externalized its border controls by forming agreements with non-EU countries such as Turkey, Libya, Tunisia turning them into migration buffers, effectively preventing migrants from reaching European soil. These measures encompass financial support, training

border security and establishing surveillance systems. Through agreements and in this context the MoU pave the way for the extension of the EU transactional approach. Linking migration control to development aid, the use of incentives such as financial aid, trade relations, and visa policies to secure cooperation and closer ties with third countries. Tunisia plays the gatekeeper by applying stricter border surveillance and restrict migration to Europe.

The EU's proposed to pay Tunisia billions of euros to support its economy in order to diminish migrant push factors and control its borders with frontline European countries such as Italy, Greece, and Spain, which bear disproportionately significant costs from irregular migration. However, this securitized approach has been met with criticism from liberal and progressive parties that push for human-centered policies for migration and including the obligations.

6. The EU's Broader Geopolitical Strategy in North Africa:

The EU is progressively overshadowed by other countries like Russia and China in North Africa. Both have stepped up their presence through investments and partnerships, mainly in energy (Zoubir, 2020). Therefore, the EU must manage this multipolar world carefully to sustain its influence while maintaining its interests. Its strategy thus, involves not only direct engagement with North African states but also broader regional cooperation initiatives, including the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. The United States continues to seek European help in the fight against the counterfeit (Bicchi, 2019). On the one hand, the political engagement by the European Union with North African countries involves support for establishing democracy according to their historical background and, on the other hand, pragmatism in the form of cooperation in security issues (Del Sarto, 2021). Some of the countries like Morocco capitalize on their strategic position regarding migration control to bargain in their dealings with the EU (Fernández-Molina, 2019). Thus, these relationships tend to be transactional in nature. The EU propagates the demands of governance reform while still balancing the security priorities of those states with the need for political stability (Lavenex & Kunz, 2022).

D. Tunisian Perspective

1. Economic Challenges and the Need for Financial Assistance

Tunisia is grappling with severe economic challenges, including rising inflation, persistent unemployment, and an urgent need for financial relief. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the European Union promises critical financial assistance to address these issues. It includes €150 million in direct budgetary support and up to €900 million in macro-financial aid, contingent on Tunisia reaching an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This financial lifeline is crucial for stabilizing the nation's struggling economy, which has been further weakened by ongoing political instability following President Kais Saied's controversial consolidation of power in 2021. The ambiguity regarding economic governance, along with diminished investor confidence, has intensified Tunisia's budgetary crisis, rendering foreign help essential to its recovery strategy.

2. Trade Relations: Opportunities and Structural Barriers

The 1995 Association Agreement established a foundation for economic collaboration by fostering free trade and lowering tariffs between Tunisia and the EU. The MoU expands on this framework to strengthen trade relations and promote investment in Tunisia in important sectors like agriculture, machinery, and textiles. Moreover, the EU's support for Tunisia's economic reforms offers a chance to increase the availability of Tunisian products in European markets.

This ongoing trade relationship highlights the EU's strategic interest in keeping Tunisia as a vital economic and trade ally, while also raising concerns about the distribution of benefits and the potential impact on Tunisia's economic independence. While the agreement aimed to enhance Tunisian access to EU markets, numerous non-tariff barriers and strict quality standards hindered the entry of Tunisian products into Europe. This limited access stopped Tunisia from fully seizing potential economic opportunities.

The MoU appears to build upon the imbalanced dynamics set by the 1995 agreement, emphasizing that the EU is prioritizing its interests over the Tunisian benefits. The MoU has the potential to tie financial assistance to Tunisia's compliance with EU migration policies. This conditionality could prioritize

European security interests over the socio-economic well-being of the Tunisian population, potentially hindering the country's ability to determine its own path of development.

3. Migration Management: A Strategic Bargaining Tool for Tunisia

A key aspect of the MoU is the management and control of migration from Tunisia to Europe. The EU seeks to reduce irregular migration by enhancing Tunisia's border management capabilities through equipment's and supporting efforts to tackle human trafficking and smuggling networks. This strategy aligns with the EU's ongoing practice of externalizing its border controls, similar to agreements made with countries like Turkey and Libya. For Tunisia, cooperating with the EU on migration control acts as a leverage point to obtain financial and diplomatic assistance.

Considering the socio economic and political context in Tunisia, the MoU is a means to address domestic concerns about migration and its associated challenges and reinforce the Tunisian government legitimacy while also gains leverage in its dealings with the EU and other international actors. Tunisia positions itself as a vital partner in addressing migratory challenges, which can be beneficial in negotiations for additional support and resources. However, this cooperation raises concerns about the prioritization of European interests and the potential for human rights violations.

4. Green Energy Transition: A Long-Term Economic Strategy

The MoU commitment to facilitating a green energy transition in Tunisia is seen as an opportunity for Tunisia. The European Union plans to invest in renewable energy projects, aiming to harness Tunisia's abundant solar and wind resources. This initiative not only has the potential to stimulate economic growth and diversify the Tunisian economy but also aligns with global sustainability trends. By focusing on renewable energy, Tunisia could position itself as a regional leader in green technologies, attracting investments and fostering innovation in this critical sector. Additionally, this commitment to green energy could contribute to job creation and enhance energy security in Tunisia, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and promoting environmentally friendly practices. Tunisia aims to attract international investment in the renewable energy industry, create a strategic hub for green energy production,

serving both domestic energy demands and European demand for sustainable energy sources.

The MoU supports project to use generate green hydrogen from renewable sources including wind and solar electricity. This project is planned to create 200,000 tons of green hydrogen per year in its initial phase, allowing Tunisia to integrate into the European energy market. The generated hydrogen will be transferred to Central Europe via the "SouthH2 Corridor" pipeline. Ultimately, the EU's investment in Tunisia's renewable energy sector reflects a broader commitment to combating climate change while supporting sustainable development in partner countries.



III. KEY PROVISIONS OF THE EU-TUNISIA MOU MIGRATION CONTROL

A. Border Control and Anti-Smuggling Measures

The EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed on July 16, 2023, establishes a comprehensive framework for cooperation between the European Union and Tunisia, with a particular emphasis on migration management. This agreement is structured around five thematic areas: macroeconomic stability, economy and trade, green energy transition, people-to-people contacts, and migration and mobility. Among these, the focus on migration is especially significant, as it aims to address the dual challenges of irregular migration and the development of legal migration pathways. By targeting these areas, the MoU seeks to enhance cooperation while reflecting the broader geopolitical and strategic objectives of both parties. This multifaceted approach underscores the EU's efforts to manage migration flows effectively, reduce irregular crossings, and foster sustainable partnerships with key transit countries like Tunisia.

As part of this agreement, the EU has pledged €105 million for border and migration control and has offered technical support, including upgrading equipment and training staff. This support aims to improve Tunisia's maritime and border surveillance systems, dismantle networks involved in human smuggling and trafficking, and conduct search and rescue missions within its maritime borders.

B. Frontex and Tunisia: Expanding EU Border Surveillance and Rising Ethical concerns: Pushbacks, surveillance, and human rights violations

Frontex was accused of several cases in Italy during Operation Triton in 2018 critics argue that it prioritized security over search and rescue efforts and in Aegean Sea was accused of illegal pushbacks of migrants trying to reach Greece.

to Turkish waters. Frontex supported the Libyan Coast Guard critics argue that it is inhumane and in breach of international law. The EU and its Member States

have a responsibility to rescue people in distress and to bring them to a place of safety where their lives and safety are not under threat, where their basic needs are covered and where they are safe from persecution and from being returned to the country they fled (chain refoulement).

The European Ombudsman investigated Frontex's accountability mechanisms. The inquiry highlighted deficiencies in how the agency monitors and addresses potential abuses during operations in addition to insufficient coordination with NGOs conducting rescue missions.

The European naval Operation Sophia, which rescued more than 40,000 migrants and refugees, terminated the deployment of vessels in 2019. There is no longer a single European state rescue vessel in the Mediterranean. NGOs trying to fill the SAR gap are frequently hindered, prosecuted and their vessels are confiscated. By stopping any SAR activities and obstructing NGOs from saving lives, Europe is responsible for the deaths of thousands of people in the Mediterranean.

The EU and its Member States are attempting to escape their responsibility by shifting its SAR obligations onto Libya or Tunisia. Libya is probably one of the most unsafe and dangerous country for migrants in the world. People intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard are transferred to detention centers where they are systematically exposed to arbitrary detention in inhumane conditions, and where torture, extreme violence, rape, arbitrary killings and exploitation are endemic.

Memorandum of understanding on migration has raised concerns that the European Union has raised migration controls higher than democratic values and human rights.

The continuing democratic backsliding of Tunisia under President Kais Saied has also complicated the already tattered EU-Tunisia relations. Since the consolidation of power through extraordinary measures in 2021, Saied has experienced continuous criticism for destroying democratic institutions, abolishing political opposition, and limiting civil liberties. EU engagement with his government without actual conditions on democratic reforms has also been criticized as an endorsement of authoritarian rule.

Having established itself as a global champion of human rights and

democracy, the European Union is considered to have played a significant role in Tunisia's political and socio-economic landscape since the Arab Spring events of 2011. Recent developments, notably the 2023 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), struck between the EU and Tunisia, have raised concerns regarding the EU's involvement in human rights violations and what could be construed as contributions to the democratic decline in Tunisia. This article critically analyses the responsibility of the EU under international law, highlighting also implications of its policies for human rights and governance in Tunisia.

C. Migrant Returns: Tunisians and Non-Tunisians

Tunisia will increase the number of the return of its own nationals, it already has bilateral readmission agreements with Italy and France which allow the repatriation of Tunisian irregular migrants and also to facilitate the return of non-Tunisians to their countries with the support of the International Organization for Migration IOM the MOU did not explicitly mention the term readmission the way the EU readmission agreements do but it rather mentions their cooperate efforts to stop the irregular migrants and support voluntary return.

D. Assistance for Search and Rescue Operations and the Establishment of Tunisia's Maritime Search and Rescue Region (SRR)

Brussels is playing a significant role in supporting the Tunisian Navy on multiple fronts. Since January 2023, the EU has been offering funding and assistance to help develop the Tunisian Coast Guard Academy, working alongside the International Centre for Migration Policy Development and the German police. This initiative aims to build the academy, improve the educational curriculum, and foster partnerships with other training institutions. The academy is projected to be completed by June 2026, with a total budget of 13.5 million euros. On June 19, 2024.

Tunisia announced the establishment of its own maritime Search and Rescue Region (SRR). This move allows Tunisia to enhance its border controls and manage migration flows more effectively, demonstrating its willingness to comply with international maritime law and its commitment to the MoU with the EU. These initiatives highlight the EU's strategic aim to externalize border control to countries

of origin and transit, showcasing the EU's geopolitical influence in shaping migration policies beyond its own borders. However, while this is a formal step towards fulfilling Tunisia's responsibility to protect life at sea, the reality is that "European Rescue Coordination Centers" will now transfer boats in distress within the Tunisian search and rescue zone to the Tunisian coordination center. This reinforces the gradual withdrawal of EU actors in favor of actors with poor human rights records. The establishment of the SRR supports Italy's approach of outsourcing border control. Italy aims to alleviate pressure on its migrant reception and management system by delegating rescue and return responsibilities to Tunisian authorities. However, the intensity of this strategy has recently increased. Libya has also adopted a similar approach, declaring its maritime boundaries at the International Maritime Organization in December 2017 with the agreement of Rome. This approach risks becoming yet another tool for exploiting people's rights, rather than effectively fulfilling the responsibility to safeguard maritime safety.

The EU and its Member States' cooperation with Tunisia, as with Libya, risks normalizing serious crimes against persons seeking asylum and weakening the integrity of the international search and rescue system by diverting it for migration control objectives. To coordinate maritime search and rescue efforts, Tunisia adopted Order No. 181 of 2024, which was published in the Official Gazette on April 5, 2024. It establishes a wider framework for possible humanitarian abuses in the Mediterranean, which is likely to lead to more migrant deaths by intensifying clashes between Tunisian Coast Guard ships and vulnerable migrant boats. In keeping with the European Union's restrictive migration policy, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has also modified the map of the Tunisian Search and Rescue Area, enlarging the Coast Guard's operational area to allow for more captures and returns. the EU played a huge role in supporting the violations practices against migrants by giving legitimacy the authorities under the MoU through logistic and financial support

By positioning itself as a proactive player in migration governance, Tunisia can strengthen its sovereignty and take the lead in addressing key issues that directly affect its borders. This also puts Tunisia in a favorable position for future negotiations with the EU. Furthermore, the establishment of the SRR opens up opportunities for the EU to provide more financial and technical assistance, in

exchange for limiting sea departures to Europe, including those requiring protection.

E. Legal Migration Pathways: The Truth of this Promise

1. The MoU's Legal Migration and Talent Partnerships

The MoU also promotes legal migration, with the EU and Tunisia agreeing to work on the implementation of a Talent Partnership that will make it easy for highly-skilled Tunisians to move into the EU. For example, Germany, France, and Belgium have so far offered 300 places under the Talent Partnership. Nonetheless, their limited approach and broader effects raise questions about fair access, skill erosion, and the dynamics of migratory governance.

The agreement does not establish a unified EU-wide migration policy, it rather reinforces existing frameworks such as Talent Partnerships and mobility programs with individual member states. However, without a clear and open execution plan, the full impact of these relationships remains unknown.

The availability of legal migration routes is closely related to Tunisia's cooperation in combating irregular migration. This concept means that migration opportunities are being used as a motivator for stronger border controls. This connection raises questions about whether Tunisia's role in migration administration is primarily determined by external forces rather than internal concerns.

2. Previous Legal Migration Initiatives & Their Limits

The EU and Tunisia have entered into several agreements to promote legal migration. The foundation for these efforts was set with the EU-Tunisia Association Agreement in 1995, which started to tackle migration as part of political and economic collaboration. In 2014, a Mobility Partnership was created to discuss Visa Facilitation agreements, designed to simplify the process for specific groups of Tunisian citizens, particularly students, researchers, and business professionals, in obtaining European visas. This was accomplished by adjusting visa regulations and offering funding for training and capacity-building programs aligned with labor market needs. However, the benefits were limited to a small segment of the population, mainly the elites, and did not cover all sectors. This situation sparked worries about possible brain drain and complications with visa processes. However,

the partnership laid the groundwork for future initiatives. In line with the EU's broader migration strategy and its commitment to the 2014 Mobility Partnership with Tunisia, discussions for visa facilitation and readmission agreements began in 2016, aiming to simplify visa access for students, researchers, and professionals. The Readmission Agreement aimed to ensure that Tunisian migrants in irregular situations living in EU Member States could return to Tunisia, as well as third-country nationals who had passed through Tunisia on their way to the EU. However, Tunisia agreed to readmit its own nationals irregularly present on the territory of the EU but declined to accept the readmission of third-country nationals (TCNs), which is not a legal obligation. unlike the case with the EU-Turkey deal in 2016.

Facilitating legal migration pathways becomes an obligation with the increasing number of irregular migrants reaching Europe and the labor shortage in some sectors within the EU states. While the MoU emphasizes the importance of facilitating legal migration pathways, it lacks concrete commitments and mechanisms to implement these pathways effectively. The focus appears to be predominantly on curbing irregular migration and enhancing border controls, facilitating returns rather than promoting legal avenues for migrants seeking to enter or reside in the EU. For instance, the Talent Partnerships in 2021 provided specific sectors with opportunities such as healthcare, IT, and agriculture. It had a positive but limited effect, assisting only a small number of Tunisian workers annually, and it received criticism and dissatisfaction from the Tunisian authorities and civil society. "Facilitation remains restricted only to the elites" and does not target young unemployed Tunisians who would like to either look for opportunities abroad or to "travel and see the world" (Public official, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, Nov. 2017).

Furthermore, The EU's Blue Card initiative, which aims to attract highly trained workers from non-EU nations, has had minimal success in Tunisia. This is partly due to its complicated application process and high requirements. Tunisia's low participation in the Blue Card scheme highlights a disparity between the EU's stated purpose of attracting skilled migrants and the practical challenges that candidates encounter. Although the EU has labor shortages in a variety of areas, the obstacles faced by Tunisian workers in accessing this program reveal a gap between lofty policy goals and their practical implementation.

3. The Reality of Visa Policies: A Barrier, not a Solution

Since the mid-1980s, in parallel with the strengthening of the EU's external borders and the creation of the Schengen area, maritime migration across the Mediterranean has increased. Tunisians often face a complicated visa application process, it requires several documents, such as a bank statement to prove financial stability and a certificate of attendance from university or school for students. Additionally, the visa fees are high since the application is usually handled by external providers such as TLScontact which charge additional fees during the process. most Schengen countries charging €80, with some exceptions such as the Netherlands which charges €90. Unfortunately, Tunisians also experience a high rejection rate the rejection according the statistics presented by Schengen visa info the Schengen states rejected 38,893 visa applications from Tunisia 24.35% rejection rate (SchengenVisaInfo, 2023). Despite the EU's commitment to introduce new visa regulations, the process remains challenging for Tunisians.

4. Outsourcing of Visa Processing & Discriminatory Practices

TLScontact is a private company that has been providing visa application services in Tunisia since 2012. Currently, TLScontact is handling visa applications for France, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Lithuania and Latvia. The company helps streamline the application process by scheduling appointments, collecting necessary documents, and processing fees. However, this outsourcing to private firms can leave applicants unclear about the specific requirements set by the embassies, particularly when there is a lack of guidance and support from TLScontact. This situation creates an additional hurdle for applicants, often prioritizing profit over their needs, which complicates the visa application process and adds to the difficulties faced by citizens in the country.

Besides TLScontact there is VFS Global which handles visa applications for the UK, Finland, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. BLS International takes care of visa applications for Spain, while Almayiva manages those for Italy. All of these companies are play the role of an intermediary preventing applicants from direct contact with the state. This move was part of a broader trend of outsourcing public services. By 2019, TLScontact's revenue had surpassed 8 million dinars. The company is affiliated with the international Teleperformance

Group, which employs complex corporate structures and tax optimization strategies to reduce tax liabilities. These strategies involve profit-shifting and overbilling through intermediaries in Luxembourg, a country recognized for its favorable tax laws. It anticipates generating over 10 billion euros in revenue by 2025. While the consulates utilizing TLScontact's services report satisfaction with its operations, they do not address any ethical issues related to its tax practices (Infantino, 2020).

Infantino is a researcher focusing on migration and border control practices. She highlights that migration control is fundamentally political, and the outsourcing of visa processing to private companies creates a bureaucratic system that hinders direct communication between applicants and government representatives. This alienation complicates applicants' ability to navigate the visa application process. She claims *“When the governed no longer get to meet the rulers, they are stripped of their power to challenge and negotiate their positions”* (Infantino, 2020).

IV. IMPACT ON MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN TUNISIA

Tunisia has had a mixed record in migration policy following democratic transformations in 2011. The country has largely failed to reconcile domestic prerogatives with external considerations, producing a complex governance structure for migration.

A. Tunisian Migration Context

Democratization has had a significant impact on how migration policy is debated and decided in Tunisia. Following the revolution, 18 parliamentary seats were reserved for Tunisian emigrants, and a State Secretary for Migration and Tunisians Abroad (SEMTE) was appointed to oversee and direct Tunisia's immigration and emigration policies. Emergency procedures were implemented to address the problem of entering migrants and refugees in Southern Tunisia, and talks developed on the necessity to reform the country's securitized immigration law and adopt an asylum policy. In this setting, Ben Ali's political treatment of migrants, who were marginalized and denied rights, posed a critical test for the new democracy and its human rights values (Ben Slama, 2019).

B. The Situation of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Tunisia

Asylum law and migration policy stymied in 2013 by a wave of political assassination, surmounting tensions in neighboring Libya, and persistent economic challenges. From that time, politicians have been able to deprive immigration of politically partisan action. The changes in immigration policy that have been applied from then on will remain informal or limited to specific groups of migrants. Attempts were made to establish new migration and asylum legislation during and after the revolution. Nevertheless, Tunisia did not record legislation that would ensure to seek refuge, as required by the 2014 constitution which explicitly guarantees the right to

asylum and upholds the principle of non-refoulement, reflecting the country's commitments as a State Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol (Tunisia, 2014). However, despite these legal assurances, Tunisia has yet to establish a comprehensive asylum law, leaving its asylum system incomplete.

C. Lack of Asylum Infrastructure in Tunisia: UNHCR's Limited Role and EU's Outsourcing of Asylum Processing

The absence of a national asylum law or system related to migrants in place means that it is illegal for individuals to enter, stay, or leave the country without proper documentation. Tragically, in 2023 alone, over 1,300 people died or went missing in shipwrecks off the Tunisian coast, according to the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) (FTDES, 2023). This number is part of a larger statistic, as over the past decade, more than 30,000 people have lost their lives in the Mediterranean, with over 3,000 deaths occurring in 2022 alone, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (IOM, 2022).

The absence of such legislation results in significant gaps in refugee status determination, leaving many refugees unprotected. For instance, individuals recognized as refugees by UNHCR often lack access to residency documents, limiting their rights and protections (UNHCR, 2021). While some refugees benefit from access to basic healthcare and education, the absence of a proper legal framework increases the risk of chain refoulement, undermining Tunisia's adherence to international refugee standards. Many asylum seekers are still in legal limbo, and access to this process can be restricted. This is largely due to insufficient logistical capacity to adequately receive, protect, and care for migrants who enter the country illegally. Consequently, detention centers, often referred to as holding or reception centers, are utilized to confine irregular migrants, especially those trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean. These centers are operated by Tunisia's security forces, which are part of the Ministry of Interior. Since 2011 they have not changed much for Tunisian emigrants. Their demands for more rights continued to clash with European security-driven interests of establishing curbs on immigration and better returns. The country faces pressure to deport these migrants to prevent becoming a focal point for international migration.

D. Human Rights Violations

1. Democratic Decline and Authoritarianism

Even before the MoU, Tunisia started experiencing a decline in freedom and human rights. The Tunisian president Kais Said suspended parliament in July 2021 and acquired extensive powers. The situation in Tunisia illustrates a disturbing pattern of escalating authoritarianism and discrimination against vulnerable people in Tunisia, thereby ending the country's democratic process and endangering the hard-won liberties gained since the 2011 revolution.

With the significant political changes happening in Tunisia after 2011, this security-oriented hierarchy had remained and thus posed problems with further mobilization of civil society and public awareness in the country. These challenges gave the regime a crucial chance to reinforce its political power in July 2021. However, this came with a contradicted approach to the previous economic and social policies. The regime reinstated a climate of individual rule, limited public spaces, and systematically rolled back the freedoms that Tunisians had depended on to protect their political, economic, and social rights (Human Rights Watch, 2023). This decline was further characterized by a climate of fear, driven by a surge of arrests and trials aimed at journalists, creatives, protesting youth, union members, and politicians.

As of February 2025, Tunisian authorities were still prosecuting activists involved in migration-related civil activities, continuing the crackdown on civil society. Cherifa Riahi, Mohamed Jouou, Iman El Wardani, Iqbal Khaled, and Ayyad Bousalmi are among those facing legal prosecution as a result of their efforts in migrant help and human rights advocacy. This underscores an ongoing campaign to silence critics of Tunisia's migration policies and treatment of asylum seekers.

2. Discrimination and Violence Against Migrants and Refugees

Sub-Saharan African migrants commonly face discrimination and xenophobia and are treated more as offenders rather than as people in need of protection (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023). Following arrests at sea or arbitrary detentions on Tunisian soil, Tunisian police have regularly abandoned migrants in the Tunisian desert or distant border areas with Libya and Algeria.

without taking into consideration their status (Amnesty International, 2024). These acts may be considered unlawful mass expulsions, a complete disdain for refugees' and migrants' right to life, and a breach of the non-refoulement principle. This is a clear violation of their human rights and goes against the principles of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. These acts may be considered unlawful mass expulsions, a complete disdain for refugees' and migrants' right to life, and a breach of the non-refoulement principle (Smith, 2022). Those who are taken away to the borders face major human rights violations in Libya and expulsion from Algeria to Niger. According to reports claiming evidence from the UN, Tunisian security forces apprehended putative irregular migrants on land and sent them directly to Libyan authorities, who then subjected them to arbitrary detention, forced labor, extortion, and torture (Al-Karimi, 2024).

A number of interconnected difficulties compel Sub-Saharan Africans to seek better prospects elsewhere, influencing their migration to Europe. Many people leave their native nations due to ongoing economic issues, such as widespread poverty, high unemployment rates, and a lack of secure employment opportunities. These economic challenges are exacerbated by political instability, poor governance, and ongoing hostilities in areas such as the Sahel and Horn of Africa, which have displaced millions of people. Furthermore, climate change-related issues like as droughts, desertification, and resource scarcity affect living circumstances, particularly in rural areas. These obstacles, combined with restricted chances for advancement and human development, have made migration a necessity for many people in Sub-Saharan Africa.

3. Tunisia's Crackdown on Migrants

The plan to deport sub-Saharan African migrants from Tunisia began in April 2024 when security forces violently removed hundreds of migrants from a camp, they had set up in front of the United Nations headquarters in the Tunisian capital, before being deported to the Algerian border. Between 500 and 700 individuals lived in these makeshift camps after being forced out of their homes and jobs following President Kais Saied's speech in February 2023, where he condemned the presence of "hordes of illegal immigrants" from sub-Saharan African countries, labeling it a "conspiracy" aimed at changing the country's demographic composition. He tends to blame them for the current economic situation.

The migrant crisis continues to escalate in several cities, particularly in the capital, Tunis and in Sfax, located in the southeast, with an increase in the number of asylum seekers seeking deportation to other destinations or a regularization of their residency status in Tunisia. July 2023, the Ministry of Interior reported that Tunisia was home to over 80,000 immigrants, with 20,000 residing in Sfax Governorate. Following the incident of the murder of a Tunisian man in the city of Sfax during clashes involving sub-Saharan, hate speech began to emerge, blaming the death of the young man on all Africans with an incitement aimed at "cleansing the state of their presence" (Al-Karimi, 2024). Which caused political repercussions.

4. Inhumane Treatment of Migrants

Migrants in their current locations of residence confront various challenges, the most notable of which are violence by other migrants, incapacity to interact with their family in the country of origin, and violence by Tunisians. This was followed by the authorities' refusal to conduct systematic individual protection needs evaluations. Also tortured and ill-treated refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants during their disembarkation, detention, or collective expulsion (Human Rights Watch, 2023). In addition to detaining migrants in Tunisia's territorial seas, security officers insist on monitoring them on land. And they deported people arbitrarily without any legal clarification or clear strategy, and without paying any respect to the humanitarian crisis and the international agreements signed (Fargues & Rango, 2020). Furthermore, in the continuation of this suffering in numerous districts of the Republic, where the security forces chose to push the migrants to select open spaces, such Al-Amara, Al-Jadria, and Kasserine (UNHCR, 2023).

Migrants have set up tents in Tunis, calling for protection. In a statement, the refugees expressed that they "fled the Sudanese war in search of safety and security, but found themselves without shelter, taking refuge in a public park in the Lake area under harsh climatic and humanitarian conditions, lacking basic human necessities" (Amnesty International, 2023). They asserted their rights under the Geneva Convention, which Tunisia has signed, and stated that the High Commission has not adequately addressed their needs or provided meaningful support.

5. Cases of Violence, Torture, and Sexual Assault Against Sub-Saharan Migrants in Tunisia

These cases provide examples of extreme violence, torture, and sexual abuse that sub-Saharan migrants are subjected to in Tunisia. From police brutality and mob violence to sexual exploitation and forced abandonment in the desert, migrants in Tunisia face grievous human rights violations with little to no protection from authorities.

- **Case 1: Tunisian Security Forces' Brutality and Torture of Migrants, April 2023:**

Security forces in Tunis cracked down in April 2023 in Tunis' district of Lac 1, ejecting several dozen sub-Saharan migrants out of their camps, arresting them, and taking them to holding camps. Security forces, witnesses say, subjected them to excessive brutality, including beatings with a baton and use of an electric shock (Human Rights Watch, 2023). A Sierra Leonean refugee testified about his ordeal, stating security officers subjected him to torture with a taser, a wood plank, and a boot in the ribs. He received severe injuries, but, similar to most of the detainees, he was not taken for medical examination (Amnesty International, 2023). Some of the arrested migrants were deported, and others were simply left in rural regions with no food and water. The case is an expression of brutality with which sub-Saharan migrants have been subjected to at the hands of Tunisian security forces. There continues to be a lack of accountability for such abuses, putting lives at risk for immigrants.

- **Case 2: Anti-migrant Violence in Sfax, July 2023:**

In Sfax, in July 2023, relations between Tunisian citizens and sub-Saharan immigrants soured following a Tunisian citizen's murder, in which a suspected immigrant was involved. In response, mobs of citizens attacked black immigrants, storming into apartments, beating them, and burning property (United Nations, 2023). Migrants testified fleeing for their lives in streets, pursued by groups of weapon-bearing thugs, attacking them with knives, canes, and other weapons (International Organization for Migration, 2023). Most of them fled in fright, but Tunisian security forces retaliated by arresting many of them in bulk, rather than protecting them

Dozens of immigrants were taken to Libya and Algeria borders and then abandoned with no food, no water, and no shelter at all. Some of them died of extreme temperatures and dehydration.

The case mirrors increased anti-sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia, with state and community actors involved in their torture.

- **Case 3: September 2024 – Violence and Rape in El Amra Migrant Camp**

El Amra, a city located near Sfax, accommodates one of Tunisia's biggest migrant camps. In investigations, it was revealed that immigrants in the camp underwent routine brutality, including rape, beating, and robbery. The most susceptible in such cases were women, with many reporting sexual abuse at the hands of Tunisian national guard members. Some alleged security officers arrested them under fabricated accusations, then demanded sexual favors in exchange for freedom (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2024). Others were taken to secluded locations and raped. Aside from sexual abuse, male immigrants were beaten and mugged regularly. Some of them were forced to pay bribes in an attempt to escape abuse. Immigrants in the camp lived in overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions, with little access to clean water and medical care. The case mirrors poor living standards in immigrant camps and routine abuse at the hands of security organs, particularly for female immigrants.

- **Case 4: November 2024 – Detention of Migrant Activist Abdallah Said:**

In November 2024, Tunisian security arrested Abdallah Said, a famous activist of Chadian origin who had been actively involved in supporting immigrants of a sub-Saharan origin. Abdallah Said was accused of supporting illegal immigrants entering Tunisia, but human rights groups protested that his arrest was politically motivated. Said's organization provided food, accommodation, and legal support to migrants who have been abused and abandoned. His arrest represented a crackdown on migration advocacy and humanitarian work in Tunisia (Amnesty International, 2024). After his arrest, other groups working in solidarity with migrants have seen increased harassment, including prosecution and threats, at the hands of the state. The case shows Tunisia not only targeting migrants but even those who try to help them, and in the process, creating an even larger hurdle for migrants in accessing care and protection.

- **Case 5: 2019 – Widespread sexual Violence Against Migrant Women:**

A 2019 report documented numerous cases of gendered violence experienced by sub-Saharan migrant women in Tunisia. Most of these women have fled domestic abuse and war in their countries, only to face new types of danger in Tunisia (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). Some female migrants working in domestic work have been sexually abused and harassed at work. Others have been recruited for work but forced into prostitution by traffickers. Lack of legal status and protection in Tunisia keeps migrant women afraid of reporting such abuses. Those reporting them have a high chance of being deported, not pursued for prosecution. According to a report, sexual violence is a widespread and un-punished practice for most migrant women in Tunisia.

- **Case 6: October 2024 – Stigmatization and sexual Violence of Migrant Women**

Reports in October 2024 indicated sexual violence to have become almost inescapable for migrant women in motion through Tunisia. Most have testified to having been raped by traffickers, security, and civilians (European Union, 2024). One survivor, a 44-year-old Ivorian woman, had been raped at a tender age by her uncle and then traveled to Tunisia for refuge. Nevertheless, when she arrived in Tunisia, she underwent additional sexual abuse at the hands of Tunisian security and gangs. A second victim, a transwoman from Guinea, testified to having gone through extreme brutality and degradation during migration. She was attacked numerous times during her migration through Mali and Algeria, and when she arrived in Tunisia, she continued to suffer abuse for her gender identity (Human Rights Watch, 2024). The case confirms that trans people and migrant women are at a high risk of sexual abuse and discrimination during migration.

- **Case 7: July 2024 – Tunisian Government Dumping Migrants in Sahara Desert:**

A report in July 2024 backed by a report in a UN report revealed that Tunisian security rounded off sub-Saharan immigrants regularly and dumped them in the Sahara Desert. According to reports, groups of immigrants, including pregnant women and children, were simply dumped in outlandish regions of the desert with no food, no water, and no coverings for protection (United Nations, 2024). Many of

them died of dehydration and heat exhaustion. Survivors testified to having traveled for days in search of help, with a few even drinking their own urine in an attempt to survive. Those rescued by humanitarian groups underwent extreme malnutrition, burns, and exhaustion. The case is a direct contradiction with international laws concerning humans and humans' rights. Instead of processing immigrants through proper channels, governments are simply dropping them in life-threatening environments.

6. Decline of Civil Liberties and Exacerbation of Existing Issues

Various international and local groups, human rights advocates, and attorneys have pointed out a concerning deterioration in civil liberties and fundamental rights in Tunisia, affecting both migrant communities and Tunisians. Since 2021, the country has seen a substantial decline in human rights, as seen by the demolition of institutional safeguards for these rights, the weakening of judicial independence, and the restriction of freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly (Amnesty International, 2024).

While migrants were suffering from discrimination and racism that was legitimized by the authorities, they faced several types of violence thrown on the borders in harsh conditions, rape, and at the same time the freedom of speech is being restricted. A lot of activists, journalists, and political leaders were arrested under the Decree 54 (Human Rights Watch, 2024). The European leaders chose to come to Tunisia and decide to sign the MOU despite the human rights violations and the danger of democracy. the EU risks to contribute to the increased risk of serious human rights violations at sea and in Tunisia against refugees, migrants, and people facing detention (European Union, 2024). In addition, they ignored the human rights topic, and democracy was the least of their interest at the two meetings between EU leaders and the Tunisian presidency. The agreement comes amid reports of escalating violence and abuses against sub-Saharan African migrants by Tunisian authorities. Which legitimize the racist practices and the violence.

This agreement between Tunisia and the European Union is very much criticized for deepening the human rights abuses directed especially against migrants and asylum seekers. In this context, organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have reported a large number of systematic violations in

Tunisia, including continuous instances of racial discrimination, forced expulsions, and degrading detention conditions for migrants (FIDH & EuroMed Rights, 2024). The financial and technical assistance provided in accordance with the MoU can lead to such abuses, and indeed, it raises concerns about indirect complicity on part of the EU.

From the point of view of international law, the principle of state responsibility states an obligation for holding the state or entity responsible for any act contributing to or furthering a violation of human rights. Continued support by the EU, in terms of funding towards Tunisia in the light of various abuses documented, might itself amount to a violation of obligations to international treaties, like the European Convention on Human Rights or the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which obligate the EU to adopt an approach in all its external actions that does not contribute to or aggravate human rights violations (European Commission, 2024).

The actions by the European Union (EU) towards Tunisia show a clash between the strategic aim of managing migrant flows and the moral commitment to human rights and democracy. To maintain its standing and moral authority, the EU is expected to take a more balanced approach and reconcile its external policies with international human rights standards. This involves mending faults in relations with Tunisia, not just for the sake of human rights, but also for the furtherance of long-term stability and democracy in the region.

7. Response from International Organizations

After these incidents, the International Organization for Migration in Tunisia announced on its official page that it has started enrolling migrants who wish to voluntarily return to their home countries as part of the Voluntary Return and Reintegration Program. The organization explained that registration for the program will occur through individual counseling, allowing migrants to return home safely and with dignity, while also receiving assistance for reintegration to help them start anew. It was noted that the registration process began in the Al-Hazaq area of the Sfax Governorate, where a group of migrants was registered with the intention of voluntary return and reintegration before being relocated to Tunisia, where they will wait for their return to their country of origin. (International Organization for

Migration [IOM], 2025).

Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2025) claimed that between May 3 and 13, 2024, Tunisian security agents imprisoned many members of legally registered organizations working on migration, asylum, and racial justice. Among those detained were Mnemty, the Tunisian Refugee Council, and Terre d'Asile Tunisia. These efforts were part of a larger strategy to dismantle groups that help migrants, making it more difficult for them to seek legal and humanitarian assistance (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and EuroMed Rights have called for an impartial investigation of the treatment of jailed activists and the conditions faced by deported migrants. They argue that the Tunisian government's actions reflect a larger effort to criminalize migration-related advocacy, which could set a dangerous precedent in the region (FIDH & EuroMed Rights, 2025).

E. The Marginalization of Black Communities & Racial Discrimination:

1. Historical Context: Tunisia's Abolition of Slavery

On 1846, Ahmed Pasha Bey officially abolished slavery in Tunisia, making Tunisia the first country in the world to abolish slavery with an official document. Prior to this, on September 6, 1841, Ahmed Bey I had already taken steps to prohibit the slave trade and the sale of slaves in local markets, even ordering the demolition of slave shops. In December 1842, he declared that anyone born on Tunisian soil would be considered free and could not be bought or sold. This was followed by his final order for the emancipation of all slaves in the country, which resulted in the complete abolition of slavery on January 23, 1846. According to the Turkish Anadolu Agency, Tunisia submitted official documentation in 2018 to have their experience in abolishing slavery recognized as part of the "Memory of the World" by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Anadolu Agency, 2018). Black Tunisians, including many who are descendants of slaves, represent an overlooked minority in the public life of Tunisia.

2. Racial Discrimination and Legal Gap

On 2017, Tunisia's parliament passed a law aiming at abolishing all types of racial discrimination. Minority advocacy organizations have referred to this highly anticipated text as "historic." It contains unprecedented punitive actions that set a new standard among Arab countries. This law classifies any distinction, exception, restriction, or preference based on race, color, lineage, or other forms of racial discrimination as a form of racial discrimination. This includes any resulting effects on the victim's rights or additional burdens imposed, particularly in the workplace.

According to Saida Mosbah the state's acknowledgment of racial discrimination requires institutions to enforce the relevant legislation. She feels that the problem is "rooted in the minds of many Tunisians, and that there is a disconnection between the new law and the reality of racial discrimination in Tunisia" (Mosbah, 2024). In certain regions particularly in the southern regions, Black Tunisians face several challenges such as limited opportunities for job positions, everyday instances of racism, and underground discrimination. This is supported by the claim of residents of the island of Djerba, municipalities continue to use the term "Atiq" to identify slave descendants on birth certificates, along with the name of the family who emancipated them. This phrase, with its "racist connotations," is still used due to a lack of civic social mobilization to demand its abolition (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The state has also not made any steps to abolish it. Many people of the Kasbah area, which is 80 kilometers from Djerba, are largely black, and they are frustrated by racial practices. Their village has been marginalized due of their skin color. They lack basic services such as cafes, cultural institutions, and adequate facilities and are treated with contempt. He believes that their sector actually requires investment and attention.

Marriage between a black man and a white woman is still stigmatized. According to Ali Koudi, a 60-year-old trader, even if a black man is attractive or wealthy, he will always be viewed as "Kahloush" (black) and not suitable for a white woman. They believe that their identity is only recognized on official documents. Many Tunisian black individuals face prejudice and discrimination when it interferes with their life path, limits their ability to study, denies them employment prospects, or influences their marriage choices.

Experts indicate that views on race in Tunisia are complex, influenced by

family values, geography, and individual backgrounds. the exact proportion of Black Tunisians within the overall population remains uncertain. The Black community in the country is diverse, comprising both Tunisians and migrants, as well as students from sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, the former leader of Tunisian national football team Radhi Jaidi who is black in an interview with AP “We must seriously consider the integration of black Tunisian. This is a topic that has been coming up for years without any real initiative.” He expressed his rejection of the campaign against immigrants from sub-Saharan African countries, stressing, “I am African not because I was born in Africa, but because Africa was born inside me.” (Jaidi, 2024). After the Tunisian president in which he attacked the sub-Saharan migrants and accused them of trying to change the demographic composition of the state. Saida Mosbah, head of the Minority Defense Organization 'Mnemty,' claims that black Tunisians also felt afraid and there had been “five or six attacks on black Tunisians.” After this statement.

3. Economic and Social Exclusion of Black Tunisians & Sub-Saharan Migrants

Sub-Saharan migrants who often arrive to Tunisia as a transit point to reach Europe face racial discrimination, limiting their economic opportunities. They are frequently subjected to exploitative working conditions and xenophobic attitudes, exacerbated by the Tunisia president speech which worsen their situation and legitimize the racists actions against them, followed by the MoU which made Tunisia as a gatekeeper for EU migrant laws rather than addressing the socio-economic realities that drive migration. The MoU strengthens Tunisia's reliance on EU funding, deepening its neoliberal economic framework and restricting its capacity to implement independent and inclusive policies.

Black Tunisians and Sub-Saharan migrants face economic marginalization which manifests as a result of Tunisia's broader economic problems because of external EU-imposed neoliberal policies. Through migration control as its primary focus the EU-Tunisia MoU locks Tunisia into a policy direction that sacrifices development priorities for EU objectives.

The MoU's migration policies heighten social tensions by promoting anti-migrant feelings and strengthening xenophobic attitudes. This not only pushes

migrants to the margins but also fosters divisions among Tunisians, especially in areas facing economic hardships. It continues to highlight Tunisia's long-standing economic vulnerabilities and systemic inequalities by placing European migration goals above the socio-economic needs of Tunisia. It strengthens a neoliberal approach that favors external interests while neglecting the structural challenges faced by Black Tunisians, sub-Saharan migrants, and marginalized areas. For Tunisia to attain sustainable development and social equity, it needs to shift its policies towards inclusive growth and invest more in its people, rather than depending on externally imposed agreements that exacerbate dependency and inequality.

The National Institute of Statistics, published its economic and social indicators for 2024. it reveals that Tunisia's unemployment rate reached 16%, while the economic growth rate for the third quarter was recorded at 1.8%. Additionally, the inflation rate was reported at 6.2% in December (National Institute of Statistics, 2024). The lack of a genuine program, combined with the continued belief that the current economic system is still effective and necessary, impedes efforts to eradicate corruption. Furthermore, bureaucratic dominance and legal barriers continue to stifle economic initiative, despite the limited measures that have been implemented.

Hate speech and racism are common in internet areas, infiltrating media and political discourse. This mirrors a larger trend that supports fascist and colonial beliefs, perpetuating harmful preconceptions about black people. Such rhetoric frequently targets the most vulnerable and marginalized populations, especially immigrant children and women. An Arabic website recently published a story featuring MP Mesdi, who made the erroneous claim that birth rates among immigrant women in Tunisia have increased significantly (FTDES. 2025). She urged Tunisian authorities to take serious steps to stem the reported "flood" of newborns from immigrant moms.

F. MoU's Impact on Migrants' Rights (Accountability, Third-Nationals, Civil Society)

The disembarkation of migrants captured or rescued at sea, who may be fleeing persecution, torture, or other serious injury and planning to seek asylum elsewhere, may effectively deprive those who require international protection of their right to seek asylum. The MoU has faced criticism over how it addresses the

treatment of migrants especially that it did not implement provisions regarding the protection of returned or intercepted migrants. Regarding the sub-Saharan in Tunisia, the president Kais Said has announced measures aimed at assisting immigrants, which include making voluntary departures easier and waiving fines for those who have delayed leaving the country. However, observers note that these measures have a limited impact.

The head of the Tunisian Association for the Defense of Human Rights, Bassam Al-Tarifi, confirms that the measures taken by Tunisia to prevent immigration and return immigrants are unclear, as there are those who are tried while others are detained in retaining centers without any legal basis. The MoU does not explicitly detail the procedures for handling third-country nationals intercepted. It prioritizes combating irregular migration, enhancing border security, and facilitating returns but does not clarify what happens to non-Tunisian migrants once they are stopped or returned. Tunisia is sending them to the desert on the Libyan Algerian borders where they will be sent back to their countries or to the detention under uncertain conditions. This raises the question if Tunisia can be considered as a safe place, this is particularly concerning in light of reports highlighting insufficient shelter, flawed legal processes, and inadequate safety measures for asylum seekers.

G. Challenges and Restrictions Faced by Civil Society Organizations and Activists

Since 2021, Tunisia has witnessed a significant decline in the protection of civil liberties and fundamental rights, impacting both its citizens and migrant populations. This deterioration is evidenced by the erosion of institutional safeguards, the undermining of judicial independence, and the tightening restrictions on freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. Human rights advocates and legal experts have highlighted these alarming trends, particularly in the context of Tunisia's handling of migration. The forced disembarkation of Tunisian nationals intercepted or rescued at sea many of whom may be escaping persecution, torture, or other forms of severe harm effectively denies these individuals their right to seek international asylum, further raising concerns about Tunisia's compliance with global human rights standards.

Following an incident of the murder of a Tunisian man in the City of Sfax

during clashes involving sub-Saharanans, hate speech began to emerge, blaming the death of the young man on all Africans with an incitement aimed at "cleansing the state of their presence". A lengthy speech delivered with a piercing tone, reminiscent of the starting gun for a relentless campaign against immigration activists, where Saeed emphatically stated that funds are being funneled to those who deceitfully and maliciously assert, they are safeguarding these immigrants. These organizations, which weep and wail in the media, are receiving substantial financial support from overseas. The individuals leading these organizations are predominantly traitors and agents. The Financial Analysis Authority must fulfill its responsibilities, and there is no place for organizations that seek to usurp the role of the state.

The MoU exacerbates the situation by supporting practices of Tunisian authorities that undermine migrants' rights. Notably, the agreement includes no mechanisms for organizations to report violations, hold Tunisia accountable, or ensure oversight to protect migrants and monitor human rights abuses. Tunisia's capacity to fulfill these commitments transparently and effectively is further undermined by its ongoing political and economic instability. Additionally, the negotiations excluded civil society, sidelining critical voices, and the agreement lacks essential safeguards to uphold human rights. Following the signing, Tunisian and EU leaders held a press conference, notably without the presence of reporters, which highlights the lack of transparency surrounding the pact.

The MOU has raised many questions about its implementation and its impact on civil society. The legitimization of Tunisian authority through the MOU makes the EU complicit in the violent practices against migrants and activists. The civic space has become increasingly restricted, with freedom being limited. Authorities are increasingly using legal measures to silence dissent and curtail freedoms, pushing the nation back to a pre-revolution state. This shift is evident in the adoption of policies that favor individual rule and exhibit hostility towards political parties, organizations, and media outlets.

Moreover, the president's reforms, including the introduction of Decree 54 in September 2022, are tightening restrictions on freedoms. This decree targets "false information and rumors" online, with Article 24 stipulating that those found disseminating such content could face up to five years in prison and fines reaching 50,000 dinar and the penalty becomes a doubling if the target is a public employee.

Consequently, the country has turned into a vast prison where anyone, including lawyers, politicians, and journalists, can be detained, many of whom have been imprisoned for over a year on charges related to conspiracy against state security and other freedom-related offenses.

These arrests have intensified the political crisis. Activists from organizations such as the UGTT, HRA, Union of Journalists, Democratic Women, and the Economic and Social Rights Forum have stated that Tunisians will not tolerate the suppression of freedom of expression, the right to form trade unions, and the right to association. This speech, which accused organizations and their workers defending migrant rights of being agents and traitors, was quickly followed by arrest campaigns that began less than a day later. Mustafa Jamali, head of the Tunisian Council for Refugees, and Abdelrazak Al-Karimi, Project Manager at the Tunisian Refugee Council, was detained on May 9, 2024, charged with conspiring to assist someone in entering Tunisian territory. This came after Facebook pages circulated a call for tenders published by the council after the organization issued a request for bids to house refugees and especially vulnerable refugees in compliance with financial and administrative procedures. Saied had expressed his anger towards the Tunisian Council for Refugees in his speech. It is vital to emphasize that the Tunisian Refugee Council acts within the framework of supporting the Tunisian state's efforts to meet its duties under the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 supplemental protocol (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024). On December 26, 2019, the Council inked an agreement with the Ministry of Social Affairs to collaborate in delivering critical social assistance to refugees and asylum seekers (Tunisian Refugee Council, 2019).

Arrests continued, including Sherifa Riahi and other officials from the Terre d'Asile Tunisia organization, on allegations of money laundering. Two days after her arrest, Iman El Wardani, the former deputy mayor of Sousse, is currently held in the civil prison of Manouba. The charges against her contradict the evidence provided by her defense, which shows that there is no justification for her arrest and imprisonment. Iman has become a target of prosecutions aimed at organizations that publicly support or defend irregular migrants from sub-Saharan countries. She is not alone in facing judicial investigations amid a broader campaign of official demonization against associations and organizations involved in migration issues.

Iman is facing multiple charges, including money laundering, fraud, creating a gang to smuggle in foreigners, and abusing her position. These allegations arise from a collaboration between the Sousse municipality and the Terre d'Asile organization, Tunisia branch.

The president declared that those associations are guilty of treason and collaboration. He has also previously cautioned judges in another context that anyone who releases the conspirators is complicit with them. Most of the detainees, who are affiliated with organizations or activists supporting irregular migrants, face similar charges: forming a coalition to assist individuals in entering Tunisian territory, specifically targeting Cherifa Riahi, Iman Al-Wardani, and Saadia Mesbah, along with accusations of money laundering. Lawyer Anas Al-Kaddousi stated in a comment to Nawaat, Numerous officials from civil society organizations are being investigated for alleged money laundering, even though they can prove the sources of funding for their associations and that these funds have gone through legal channels. It is well-known that banking and postal institutions do not allow organizations to access the funds transferred to their accounts without presenting several required documents, such as the financing contract and the organization's paperwork, and after confirming the source of the funds and ensuring that the donors are not on any banned lists.

H. Role of Civil Society Organizations in Tunisia

The MOU strengthen violations of freedom of movement, bolster repressive measures at maritime and land borders, and undermine the rights and dignity of migrants. It will fail to foster cooperation aimed at exchanging freedoms and upholding the rights and dignity of Tunisians.

Human rights organizations in Tunisia renewed their rejection of European anti migration policies, which are fueled by right-wing electoral campaigns to win votes, by strengthening Tunisia's security system and persuading authorities to establish detention centers for migrants on Tunisian territory. The degrading and invasive process of obtaining visas, along with the covertly arranged flights for the mass forced deportation of Tunisian migrants, are just a few examples of the humiliating practices employed by the EU and specifically the Italian authorities. Furthermore, their refusal to collaborate on the missing persons file and the

exploitation of the crisis to attract academic talent further highlight their lack of genuine partnership. Activists and organizations protested in front of the Italian embassy in Tunisia's capital against the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's visit to Tunisia. They requested to reveal the truth about missing migrants in Italy, particularly those who died mysteriously in Italian detention camps after their entry was confirmed.

With more harassment from the Tunisian government, civil society organizations increase their fight for migrant rights while condemning European Union policies in general. Their works have given a greater value to local voices in the migration discourse and government responses. The examination of EU migration policies by Tunisian civil society actors reveals big contradictions between local needs and European ambitions. Thus, as these organizations advocate for a more humanitarian approach towards migration; of such in-transit, the fight for changes in policy to respect human rights as they address the constraints of migration in the Mediterranean becomes more significant.

Tunisian government reaction towards the opposition of civil society from EU migration policies takes a dualistic approach: one, by utilizing the civil societies' criticisms to bargain better terms with the EU, and on the other side, suppressing dissenting voices that challenge its narrative or expose human rights abuses. This double-edged dynamic clearly reveals the tension between sovereignty, economic dependence, and consistent adherence to international human rights standards given the increased scrutiny that came from both domestic and international actors.

The exclusion of civil society from the negotiation process and implementation of the EU-Tunisia MoU raises significant concerns regarding accountability in migration governance. Civil society organizations play a crucial role in advocating for human rights, monitoring government actions, and ensuring that the voices of marginalized populations, including migrants, are heard. By sidelining these stakeholders, the MoU risks creating an opaque decision-making process that lacks the necessary checks and balances to protect human rights. This absence of accountability not only undermines public trust in both Tunisian authorities and EU institutions but also diminishes the potential for effective cooperation in addressing the complex challenges of migration and human rights protection.

UN organizations operating in Tunisia, including the International Organization for Migration, the High Commissioner for Refugees, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, have not fulfilled their intended roles as outlined in their charters and fundamental laws. For instance, when irregular migrants submit their asylum applications, the UNHCR takes on refugee affairs, which involves requesting housing, food, and healthcare. However, these essential resources are seldom made available.

Detention centers in Tunisia are operated by Tunisia's security forces, which are part of the Ministry of Interior often used to confine irregular migrants. These centers lack several kinds of subsidies because of the Tunisia capacity. There are temporary shelters and facilities run by international organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). These organizations work to provide detained migrants with voluntary return programs, legal support, and essential aid. For migrants in transit or those who have been released from detention, groups like Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the Tunisian Red Crescent offer temporary accommodation and humanitarian assistance. These agencies mostly come into play to bridge the gaps of lacking basic amenities like ample food, medical care, and sanitary facilities, and in doing so face serious limitations related to funding constraints and restricted access. Facilities sometimes function with no control; it can be challenging to keep an eye on conditions or guarantee that abuses are held accountable.

I. The EU's Responsibility and Accountability in Migration Governance

1. The Shift from Humanitarianism to Securitization

Historically, the EU has featured itself more as a partner in the democratic transition of Tunisia after the Arab Spring in 2011. This is supported by financial aid, trade agreements, and other institutional support directed towards enhancing governance and economic stability. But, behind this image of being a great partner, outsourcing its responsibilities on other non-European countries. This makes it want to escape from being accountable. Migration in Europe has undergone a major upheaval during the last several decades. The politicization and securitization of migration in Europe emerged in the 1980s as migration patterns shifted. Initially,

there was a demand for labor migration to fuel economic growth in the aftermath of World War II. However, it changed to a focus on restricting and reducing the number of foreign workers due to economic downturn and crisis. this shift was fueled by the increasing number of people heading to Europe because of the geopolitical instability the Middle East and parts of Asia and unrest in African countries. the public opinion fueled the perception of migration as a risk and related it to crimes and social unrest to implementing stricter visa policies. The Schengen Agreement in 1985 followed by mechanisms to secure external borders. these procedures paved the way to the establishment of the EU migration policy. In 1990 the Dublin Convention was created framed this approach by assigning responsibility for asylum seekers to the first country of entry. The securitization trend intensified after the migration crisis of 2015, with unprecedented numbers of migrants and refugees arriving in Europe from the Middle East.

This strategy is based on two essential dimensions. Firstly, on a preventive level, the first dimension is development aid as a migration deterrent. It takes the form of development aid allocated to third countries, specifically the countries from which waves of migration towards Europe originate. These countries are often facing political, social, or economic crises. The purpose of this aid is to address the root causes that force people to emigrate. However, there is a risk that this aid may be used for the security objectives of the Member States of the European Union, rather than addressing the root and structural causes of migration.

The second dimension is more practical, outsourcing migration management. The EU signing treaties with third countries, whether they are the countries through which migrants and refugees' transit, or their countries of origin. This approach aims to "stem the flows before they enter the territory of the Union.". For example, we can cite readmission agreements such as the one signed with Turkey in 2016 or with Tunisia in 2023 that aim to facilitate the return of persons residing illegally to their country of origin or transit.

2. The Outsourcing Dilemma: Ethics vs. Political Interests

Migration scholar Anne-Lise Chatelard, argue that outsourcing in migration has become a fundamental aspect of EU migration approach. addressing its migration issues by moving them outside its borders to third countries. She points out that

while the dependence on external partners, including transit nations like Tunisia, alleviate internal political pressures within EU member states and it frequently brings up ethical issues, especially concerning transparency. In addition to compromises accountability and human rights (Chatelard, 2021). Also, Théo Buratti says that this approach can lead to dangerous consequences. The EU-Libya migration agreement, which allowed Libyan authorities to keep refugees in terrible conditions, is a glaring example of these repercussions. Libya as a non-signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention does not provide any rights to migrants and refugees. According to numerous international organizations, migrants were even sold into slavery (Buratti, 2021). the EU frequently ignores authoritarian trends and human rights abuses in the countries it partners with for the sake of sharing the burden of migration. The Memorandum of Understanding has prioritized migration over democracy and human rights. Tunisia has a comparable risk, since assuming power in 2021, President Kais Saied's administration has tightened down on civil freedoms, opposition groups, and immigrants. The EU has been criticized for supporting authoritarian administration in Tunisia. Since the 2021 seizure of power, President Kais Saied's administration has already demonstrated a tendency toward autocracy by oppressions of civil liberties and opposition.

The EU's financial assistance may elevate Saied further, as it may be interpreted as legitimizing his administration despite its undemocratic practices. Critics say that these dynamic risks intensifying political persecution against not only opposition but also marginalized groups like migrants and refugees. As the Tunisian government obtains funding to improve border security and manage migration flows, there is concern that they will be used to stifle opposition rather than promote democratic governance

3. The Role of Far-Right Politics in Shaping EU Migration Policy

The internal and external agendas of the Union are altered by the rise of far-right parties across Europe particularly in Italy, Hungary, and France has further hardened migration policies. Such parties often carry nationalistic, anti-immigrant, and Eurosceptic programs casting the traditional view of the EU itself as a defender of democratic norms and human rights into doubt. Scholarly assessments such as Mudde's (2019) have indicated that these movements feed on fears from cultural change and economic unsteadiness while continually perpetuating narratives that

favor border security against humanitarian obligations.

The last decade witnessed a rise of right-wing movements and parties in Europe, especially with the increasing number of migrations flows from the Middle East and North Africa. Added to the economic concerns especially in Southern and Eastern Europe. This migrations dynamic increased the public fear of the economic and social impacts of this phenomenon. Right wing parties take advantage of this situation, instead of addressing the roots of the economic concerns and finding solutions to it, they take migration as a response and blame them it. They use migration as political tool, picturing migrants as a threat to European society, relating them to terrorism and Islamists or just portraying them as unable to fit into this European society and to share its values, reinforcing the belief of Europe as one entity with common values and standards and these migrants cannot fit in and adapt to this continent. Growing public anxiety about integration and security has resulted in greater political pressure for stronger immigration limits. This has been enhanced by the growing popularity of far-right groups who advocate for less immigration.

Economic concerns, particularly in Southern and Eastern Europe, resulted in years of austerity policies and uneven growth have created a favorable climate for right-wing ideology. Since the 2015 migration crisis, Orbán has taken a hardline anti-immigrant position, portraying immigrants as risks to jobs, culture, and public safety. This story is consistent with far-right ideologies, emphasizing a "no migration" policy as a fundamental basis of governance. Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Le Pen in France and Giorgia Meloni in Italy have built political capital by championing strict border controls and externalizing migration management.

Securitization transforms migration into a security concern, portraying it as a potential threat to societal stability and national interests. This narrative is used by far-right parties, they take advantage of the fear surrounding the securitization of migration, even going as far as to connect it to an increase in insecurity and terrorism. It is widely disseminated through media channels, which shapes the public opinion by emphasizing the risks migration. This process further justifies restrictive policies and externalized migration management agreements.

4. Selective Migration Policies in Hungary

Despite the government's stated opposition to immigration, Hungary has shown a readiness to accept some groups of migrants, mainly from Eastern Europe and East Asia while remaining opposed to others, particularly Muslim immigrants. These workers are frequently subjected to terrible working conditions, including as long hours, dangerous conditions. This selective acceptance demonstrates a discrepancy between proclaimed policies and actual practices. The government policies influenced the public perception, Hungarians perceive different types of immigrants differently, with Muslim migrants perceived negatively and Ukrainian migrants perceived positively, this disconnects between government communication and policies may lead to increased social tensions between citizens and migrant groups. Growing public anxiety about integration and security has resulted in greater political pressure for stronger immigration limits. This has been enhanced by the growing popularity of far-right groups who advocate for less immigration. The reality of migration policies reveals a complex situation that may impact societal dynamics.

5. Italy's Hardline Stance on Migration and its Impact on Migrant Rights

The support of the Tunisian authorities' practices is a continuity of the Italian practices against migrants. Asylum seekers have become a topic of contention historically in Italy. It is especially now used as a pawn by the rightest coalition of Italy in presenting its rhetoric against the European Union in forming laws that are watertight in cases involving immigrants. Giorgia Meloni is just one of the more or most blatant of these examples. She has demanded for "naval blockade" at the intercept rate of their destination from would-be migrants as well as putting pressure on the EU to take a very strenuous or tightrope posture concerning migrant externalization through stricter, more border externalized control measures

In 2018 Matteo Salvini as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior had its opportunity when it moved behind blocked ports to an NGO accomplished ship such as the Aquarius, still leaving the migrants adrift at sea's mercy before other EU countries agreed to accept them presents restrictions to reduce the migration flow coming and staying in Italy. these policies increase migrants' poor situations, as well as Giorgia Meloni's government restrictions to limit migrants access to

communication and limit their fundamental rights.

Under Meloni's government, further restrictions have been imposed, limiting migrants' access to communication and curtailing their fundamental rights. Both Salvini and Meloni, as nationalist leaders prioritizing Italy's interests, have strongly supported stringent immigration laws, raising significant human rights concerns. Their policies have contributed to the stigmatization of migrants within Italian society, reinforcing negative public perceptions and tightening legal penalties against them. As a result, Italy's migration policies continue to shape a divisive national discourse, further marginalizing migrant communities and deepening social divides.

J. The EU-Tunisia MoU in the Global Migration Externalization Strategy

The European Union has employed a broad range of migration and border control instruments such as memoranda of understanding, work plans, and earmarked funds to prevent so-called "undesirable" migrants from reaching European shores and to facilitate the deportation of those who do. These externalization policies have extended border controls both at sea and on land, effectively halting migrants before they leave transit countries. Simultaneously, the EU has implemented classification systems for those who do reach its borders, notably through the Hotspot Approach, which categorizes arrivals into "legitimate" refugees, "economic migrants," and those subject to detention and deportation.

Within this broader strategy, the Italy-Albania Protocol (2023) and the EU-Libya Memorandum of Understanding (2017 renewed 2023) exemplify the EU's increasing reliance on third countries to manage migration flows, particularly those affecting Italy. These agreements seek to externalize border control and asylum processing while discouraging irregular migration through reinforced cooperation with non-EU states.

1. Comparative Cases of EU Externalization: The Italy-Albania Protocol (2023): A Case Study

A protocol signed by Giorgia Meloni in November 2023 allows Italy to process asylum claims for migrants rescued at sea within 28 days (De Leo, A. 2024). Under this agreement, two detention centers will be established in Albania for a period of five years to accommodate both asylum seekers and individuals awaiting

deportation. The protocol applies to third-country nationals and stateless persons, determining whether they meet the criteria for entry, stay, or residence in Italy. This means that individuals already present in Italy who are subject to deportation may be transferred to centers in Albania.

Italy retains full responsibility for processing asylum applications in these facilities, treating them as though they were on Italian soil. The primary aim of this protocol is to "externalization" migration, asylum, and law enforcement by relocating these processes to an offshore location (Carrera, S., & Cortinovis, R. 2023). While the Italy-Albania Protocol focuses on enabling Italy to handle asylum applications beyond its borders, the EU-Tunisia MoU, although also centered on migration management, has a broader scope, including economic cooperation and energy transition. The EU has pledged €1 billion in long-term financial support to Tunisia, whereas the Italy-Albania Protocol is a bilateral agreement funded solely by Italy, with its primary focus on the establishment of detention centers.

a. Legal and human rights considerations, economic and political motivations

The Italy-Albania Protocol raises legal concerns as it insists that all asylum procedures remain under Italian jurisdiction despite being conducted outside EU territory. This has sparked debates regarding compliance with EU asylum laws and international human rights standards. Legal challenges in Italy have already halted some asylum transfers due to safety concerns about migrants' countries of origin, highlighting contradictions between national and EU legislation.

The protocol presents a significant threat to asylum rights, as a fair asylum process requires sufficient time for documentation, legal aid, and medical screening. However, these agreements risk fast-tracking decisions at the expense of due process.

Similarly, the EU-Tunisia MoU, while more aligned with EU legal frameworks, has also faced scrutiny. Tunisia is portrayed as a partner in migration management rather than merely a transit country, yet the agreement lacks robust enforcement mechanisms. Additionally, the exclusion of key stakeholders, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), raises concerns about transparency and the protection of asylum seekers' rights.

The Italy-Albania Protocol is part of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's

domestic strategy to curb migration in line with her electoral promises. Meanwhile, Albania views the agreement as an opportunity to strengthen its diplomatic ties with the EU. On the other hand, Tunisia accepted the EU-Tunisia MoU primarily for financial and economic support. Given Tunisia's ongoing financial instability and social unrest, the agreement provides much-needed economic relief, albeit temporarily.

2. The EU-Libya MoU (2017 Renewed 2023): A Case Study

The EU-Libya MoU, signed in 2017, aimed to curb irregular migration by supporting Libyan authorities in managing migration flows (European External Action Service 2018). The agreement involved EU funding and assistance to the Libyan coast guard, enabling them to intercept migrant boats and return them to Libya before they reached European shores. This approach mirrored the EU-Tunisia MoU, both of which reflect the EU's broader strategy of outsourcing border control to third countries in an effort to reduce migration flows.

a. Legal and human rights considerations, economic and political motivations

Numerous reports have exposed the connections between Libyan militias controlling detention centers and human traffickers. Evidence, including videos documenting torture and sexual violence against migrants in detention centers, has been widely circulated. Despite this, migrants intercepted at sea are often returned to Libya, in direct contradiction to international refugee protection laws.

Although the agreement has received widespread criticism, the EU renewed it in 2023, raising further ethical concerns. Both the EU-Libya MoU and the EU-Tunisia MoU exemplify Europe's willingness to partner with authoritarian or unstable regimes to control migration, prioritizing border security over human rights (European External Action Service 2023). While these agreements are presented as measures to combat smuggling networks, they lack clear accountability mechanisms, leading to concerns about implementation, oversight, and human rights violations.

Both agreements reflect the EU's use of financial and political leverage in migration governance. Libya's political instability and internal conflicts make migration control a security issue, with the EU funding Libyan authorities to prevent migrant crossings. Tunisia, on the other hand, faces economic instability and political uncertainty. The financial support tied to the EU-Tunisia MoU serves as a temporary

relief for Tunisia's economic crisis, rather than a long-term solution.

K. Impact on Global South Countries

EU border externalization policies impact other nations in the Global South, for instance, the EU funding assist Libyan coastguards in intercepting migrants and frequently returning them to detention centers where they experience harsh conditions (Human Rights Watch 2023). In addition, Agreements promote stronger border restrictions along the Moroccan-Spanish border, resulting in violent crackdowns on migrants attempting to get into Ceuta and Melilla (The New Humanitarian 2022). Also, The EU pushed Niger to outlaw irregular travel routes, damaging local economies that rely on migration.

Tunisia has emerged as a new important player, largely taking the place of Libya in search and rescue operations involving European states. As a result of heightened border security and militarization, traditional migration routes have become challenging, compelling migrants to seek alternative, often perilous, paths. This diversification complicates the management of migration for both sending and receiving countries.

V. REGIONAL AND BROADER IMPACT OF THE MOU

A. Tunisia's Position in the African Union

Tunisia's recent migration policy and particularly the controversial remarks made by President Kais Saied in February 2023. A statement depicted sub-Saharan migrants as part of a "criminal plan," was seen as racially insensitive and damaging to the wider African community. have sparked outrage from sub-Saharan African countries. Mali, Ivory Coast, and Guinea. They expressed their strong disapproval of the discriminatory speech. Mali and Ivory Coast called Tunisia Ambassadors to clarify these comments and expressed their concern over Tunisia's treatment of their citizens. Ivory Coast and Guinea have decided to return their residents from Tunisia. This decision comes after public outrage and growing fears about the safety of their citizens amid worsening tensions in Tunisia. Both governments are working together to ensure the safe return of citizens who may feel threatened or uncomfortable owing to the current situation. And expressed their rejection to these acts. Morissanda Kouyate, Guinea's Minister of Foreign Affairs, was on a chartered airplane that returned 50 Guineans to Conakry, with an additional 81 scheduled to return on future flights. In a similar situation, the government of Ivory Coast said that over 500 Ivorians had expressed interest in repatriation flights operated by the national airline, Air Côte d'Ivoire.

The consequences of accusing sub-Saharan migrants and linking them to crime could limit Tunisia's ability to promote and foster regional solidarity for further cooperation. For instance, in response to the Tunisian President Kais Saied's incendiary remarks linking Sub-Saharan African migrants to crime and violence, which have triggered an increase in xenophobic violence against these populations. The African Union (AU) warned Tunisia to stop spreading hateful messages which put migrants at risk while also criticizing government actions blaming it for the growing migrant hostility.

H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

strongly condemns Tunisia's terrible statement and reminds the country of its obligations as a member of the 55-member bloc. He stated that member nations of the African Union were compelled "to treat all migrants with dignity, wherever they come from, refrain from racialized hate speech that could bring people to harm, and prioritize their safety and human rights" (African Union, 2023). Furthermore, the AU has cancelled a conference that was scheduled to take place in Tunisia in march, 2023 and postponed until they held later another conference in Tunis, Tunisia from June 26 to 28, 2024 which focused on Africa's tax agenda and measures for combating illicit financial flows

B. Lack of Institutional Mechanisms in Sub-Saharan Africa

There is currently no institutional regional mechanism or coalition in Sub-Saharan Africa dedicated to defending migrants. This absence of organization undermines these countries' ability to respond collectively. Differences in priorities, alliances, and internal political dynamics might make it difficult for Sub-Saharan African nations to work together. These countries may decide to prioritize bigger regional crises such as conflicts, internal political instability, food hunger, and climate change. As a result, addressing the EU-Tunisia MoU may not be a top priority for their diplomatic agenda. For example, Guinea and Ivory Coast appear to favor dealing with the implications of such accords above explicitly contesting them (Mazzola, 2023; UNHCR, 2023).

The sub-Saharan African states' restrained response is likely due to a combination of economic pragmatism, diplomatic caution, and a focus on local matters. Nonetheless, the MoU's humanitarian implications, particularly for migrants, have elicited strong reactions from civil society, international organizations, and media outlets, emphasizing the need for a more robust and united African approach to migration governance and human rights.

C. Potential Fragmentation in North African Cooperation

The MoU emphasizes the containment of migrants in transit countries like Tunisia, potentially lead to extended detention and insufficient legal process within an unacceptable living standards detaining migrants become major humanitarian

concerns because African governments need to protect their citizens outside their territories more frequently.

Through their partnership with Tunisia the EU excludes sub-Saharan nations from participating in migration governance decisions. Which may deepen current imbalances in EU-Africa relations while reducing African states' capability to shape migration policies. These tensions threaten the effectiveness of African collaborative initiatives including Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA) which promotes safe dignified and orderly migration (African Union, 2018; UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2022).

1. Perspectives of Algeria and Libya

Algeria and Libya both have different perspectives on the EU-Tunisia MoU, shaped by their own migration challenges and relationships with the EU. Algeria has followed an independent, strict approach on migration, tightening its border to control the migration flow, especially after the crisis in the Sahel, which has exacerbated regional tensions and security threats, notably the latest coups d'état in Mali and Niger. The MOU can exacerbate the issue. Although Algeria is a signatory to the 1951 Convention on Refugees and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, it increased operations to repatriate and return sub-Saharan migrants towards the Sahara, on the borders with Niger where they find themselves without any means of subsistence. These measures caused a humanitarian crisis and a diplomatic tension between the two countries. According to the Alame Phone Sahara organization, there were 26,000 expulsions in 2023 and nearly 2,000 at the beginning of 2024 (Alame Phone Sahara, 2024; International Organization for Migration, 2023).

Recent reports have revealed the forced evacuation of a large number of Sub-Saharan migrants, who were reportedly left near the Algerian border in deplorable living conditions. This has raised concerns in Algeria about the potential burden of dealing with a growing influx of migrants without a formal agreement with the EU. Without the necessary resources and support, the country may struggle to effectively manage any potential influx. This not only worsens humanitarian issues but also creates tensions between neighboring governments regarding their shared responsibility to regulate migratory flows in accordance with international law

The relation between Algeria and the European Union (EU) is seen cautiously

with regard to the preservation of sovereignty and autonomy in foreign affairs. This is based on post-independence identity. Algeria has been consistent in balancing its relationship with the EU while fighting against initiatives that may compromise national decision-making capacity (Benhabib, 2022; Bougherra, 2021).

On the other hand, Libya has historically been a key migration route, prompting the EU to establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the country despite its political instability and security crisis. The EU has been condemned by international organizations such as Amnesty International and Médecins Sans Frontières for being complicit in human rights violations in Libya by engagement with militias and unofficial groups instead of recognized state authorities. The primary aim of this agreement is to reduce irregular migration by funding and training Libyan coast guards, but it comes at the expense of promoting sustainable governance and upholding human rights. The MoU calls for returning migrants to detention centers in the Libyan territory. As Libya is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, there are no laws identifying refugees or an asylum procedure in place. In addition to that, by funding the Libyan Coast Guard who is accused of cooperating with militias controlling smuggling routes and detention centers the EU risks legitimizing these groups, perpetuating instability and undermining accountability (Bettini, 2022; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2021). Reports have exposed the human rights violations in the Libyan detention centers, abuse and torture. Asylum seekers may also face deportation to their home countries, hindering their ability to have their claims evaluated in accordance with international laws. Diverting migration flows to Tunisia might reduce the pressure of dealing with migrants (Zapata-Barrero et al, 2021).

Stricter border control in Tunisia doesn't prevent migration; rather, it forces migrants and traffickers to change their routes, frequently choosing more dangerous paths to evade detention and smugglers will increase the prices to navigate these routes. Human trafficking networks got expanded. the MOUs proved that they shift migration routes and as a result they shift the pressure from one country to another and exacerbate the tension in the region. The EU Libya MoU obliged migrants and traffickers to change their route towards Tunisia and now the EU Tunisia MoU supports the authorities' practices in throwing sub-Saharan in the Algerian Tunisian border, giving the responsibility to Algeria to deal with them and traffickers they

always find another way to flee. Instead of addressing the roots causes of migration it keeps putting pressure on countries to control borders and stop migrants from reaching Europe. Further negotiations might occur in the region with different countries to sign similar agreements or to renegotiate the same ones according to the political and migration dynamic especially from the Libyan view, the EU Tunisia mou might be considerate as a competition to Libya on the European resources and financial support.

2. Cooperative Security Efforts and Regional Stability

Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya are preparing for a summit, driven by rising worries over the possible return of militants from Syria and the influx of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa crossing the borders. In April 2023, Tunisia held a tripartite summit that brought together Tunisian President Kais Saied, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, and the head of the Libyan Presidential Council, Mohamed Younes Menfi. The outcomes of that summit suggested creating several cooperative partnerships focused on security. This includes forming joint task forces aimed at coordinating efforts to safeguard border security among the three countries, particularly against the threats posed by irregular migration from sub-Saharan nations and various forms of organized crime (Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023; Tunis Afrique Presse, 2023).

They have an obligation in ensuring the borders security against the potential threat posed by returning terrorists from unstable regions, and exploring ways to curb the flow of irregular migrants from sub-Saharan African nations crossing our shared borders. But the fact that Libya is not considered a strategic partner that can be depended upon to achieve plans that might involve three parties. The current Libyan authorities appear to place more importance on foreign agreements than on the needs of their own nation. This situation is further complicated by the tense dynamics in the Maghreb region and the waning influence of the head of the Libyan Presidential Council, Muhammad Yunus al-Menfi, following the recent measures he has introduced (El-Masry, 2023; Smith, 2023).

D. Ethical Concerns and Funding Transparency

Critics refer to narratives of Tunisian authorities collectively expelling

migrants from sub-Saharan Africa as proof that this strategy could result in violations of human rights. The EU's reliance on Tunisia to manage migration, raises ethical concerns regarding the treatment of migrants and the possibility of rising violence against vulnerable people.

While these funds have enabled major improvements, concerns have been expressed about the transparency and effectiveness of budget allocation, as well as the possible impact of European migrant policy on the direction of these investments. The findings advocate for increased monitoring and a more equitable relationship that prioritizes Tunisia's socioeconomic needs alongside European interests.

E. Italy-Tunisia Migration Relations: A History of Cooperation and Tensions

1. Evolution of Italy-Tunisia Agreements on Migration

Italy and Tunisia's relations on migration have often been based on informal agreements, despite the inherently political nature of their cooperation. This raises significant concerns about transparency and accountability. The "Exchange of Notes between Italy and Tunisia concerning the Entry and Readmission of Persons in an Irregular Situation," signed in 1998, marked the first formal readmission agreement between the two countries. Under this agreement, Italy committed to providing Tunisia with technical and financial assistance to combat irregular migration, including the establishment of a detention center on Tunisian territory, in exchange for allowing an annual quota of Tunisian workers to legally enter Italy (European Commission, 1998; Italian Government, 1998).

In 2003, the two countries signed a police cooperation agreement, through which Italy provided technical assistance for maritime border control and training for Tunisian police forces. In return, Italy pledged to increase entry quotas for Tunisian workers. As migration flows toward Italian shores intensified, a third agreement was signed to accelerate the readmission process for both Tunisians and third-country nationals. In exchange, Italy agreed to build additional detention centers in Tunisia following the revolution Italy urged Tunisia to double the number of expulsions. especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying rise in sea crossings, Italy has significantly ramped up repatriation flights, including those for Tunisian nationals. The process for forcibly returning these individuals is

characterized by swift legal proceedings and a reliance on informal agreements between Italy and Tunisia. The two countries are cooperating together to deport irregular migrants through Tabarka airport away from the press and civil society organizations (Bassiouni, 2023; Zappala, 2022).

2. Detention Centers and Human Rights Violations

Despite their history of agreements, Italy and Tunisia have not established any specific agreement concerning the fate of missing Tunisians in Italy. The nature of their agreements has contributed to human rights violations and allowed for a lack of responsibility and accountability. Their corporations were based on the principle of limiting migration, controlling borders and readmission. In light of the conditions in Italian detention centers, the lack of proactive measures and transparency regarding missing has led to frustration among families and civil society. Civil society and families of the missing have persistently urged the Tunisian authorities to investigate and collaborate with the Italian one to reveal the truth of several death cases in detention centers or in the sea. Their requests are often met with silence or vague promises. Additionally, Italy's limited ability to identify and document the remains of migrants found at sea complicates the situation, leaving many cases unresolved. Such as the case of the Tunisian irregular migrant Wissam Abdel Latif who died in a suspicious circumstance after being subject to mistreatment in a detention center in Italy according to eyewitnesses (Al-Masri, 2023; Triggiani, 2023).

Tunisia's weak diplomatic stance has further exposed Tunisian migrants to human rights abuses. The country has failed to hold Italy accountable for violations against Tunisian nationals, in several instances of torture, death, and suicide were uncovered in COVID-19 quarantine vessels, detention, and deportation centers. The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) exposed and criticized these centers, noting that since 2019, at least 13 individuals have died in Italy's detention centers, with several cases attributed to suicide. The case of Ousmane Sylla, a 19-year-old Guinean migrant who committed suicide in the Ponte Galeria detention center, triggered protests from other detainees, raising yet another alert about the poor situation and living circumstances (Council of Europe, 2023; Rossi, 2023). Amnesty International reported allegations of migrants being subjected to beatings and electric shocks to coerce fingerprinting. migrants in some centers have reported sleeping on the floor without adequate bedding or being denied access

to clean drinking water. The degrading processes involved in obtaining visas, the secretive flights for the mass forced deportation of Tunisian migrants, the refusal to assist with the missing persons case, and the manipulation of the crisis to attract academic talent stand in stark contrast to the concept of a genuine partnership (Benedetti, 2023; El-Masri, 2023). Tunisia actively cooperates with Germany, Italy, and France in the mass and forced deportation of their citizens. Deportees do not enjoy their rights of legal support that would enable them to object and appeal deportation decisions, and some of them have spent years in the country of arrival. This cooperation is carried out according to bilateral agreements because Tunisia is not legally required to admit deported persons. The latest deportation was in exchange for financial aid whose value and purpose remain unclear and undeclared.

3. Local and Civil Society Responses

In light of the rising number of migrant fatalities, residents of Zarzis have taken it upon themselves to bury victims especially those from sub-Saharan migrants who tried to reach Europe, locals have stepped in to assist with the transportation of corpses to hospitals for postmortem examinations. The growing toll of migrant deaths has led to the creation of cemeteries specifically for unidentified migrants who have died during their attempts to reach Europe. Thanks to various contributions and the support of civil society, the Red Crescent has acquired a 2,500-square-meter plot of land designated for the burial of those who drowned in the Mediterranean (EuroMed Rights, 2023). This highlights the gravity of the situation in the Mediterranean, the fragility of the state and reflects its insufficient logistical capacity or even lack of political will to handle the corpses and uphold the dignity of the migrants. Advocacy groups have repeatedly asked for a more comprehensive collaboration between Tunisia and Italy to solve these tragedies. They underline the importance of effective search and rescue efforts, mechanisms for identifying deceased migrants, and support services for families who lost their children (Amnesty International, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023).

F. Impact on Tunisia's Governance & Migration Policy

1. Institutional and Policy Shifts: Executive Control and Civil Society

Exclusion

This MoU could influence Tunisia to advance its migratory governance infrastructure through the establishment or modification of organizations responsible for border control, migrant integration and asylum procedures, as well as strengthen border monitoring techniques, increase law enforcement capabilities, and formalize migration-relevant legislation in accordance with EU criteria. further enhanced with inter-ministerial cooperation amongst other ministries in charge of government migration issues, such as their ministries of Social Affairs, Foreign Affairs, and Interior. While such innovations improve administrative efficiency, they may in Tunisia shift the balance away from humanitarian migration management toward security measures.

Major policies and programs related to migration under the MoU will be put under the purview of the executive branch or specialized agencies formed for such purposes to carry out the EU directives. This will reduce the time necessary for decision-making but will also exclude civil society. stakeholders have already raised serious issues concerning democratic oversight and accountability in the governance of migration because their role will be crucial for ensuring that reforms are comprehensive and address the needs of all affected populations from

2. Socio-Economic Strain and Dependence on the EU

The socio-economic challenges facing Tunisia are compounded by the EU-Tunisia MoU, which shifts the burden of migration management onto a country grappling with its own governance and economic instability. This externalization of border control responsibilities can lead to resource strain on Tunisia's already limited infrastructure and services, affecting the local population and migrants alike. Moreover, the MoU may perpetuate economic dependency on the EU, creating a cycle where Tunisia is incentivized to prioritize migration control over sustainable socio-economic development. As a result, the agreement may inadvertently exacerbate existing inequalities and hinder the country's progress toward achieving long-term stability and prosperity. Reform's effectiveness is clearly related to Tunisia's political climate. Through further support of the Tunisian authority

practices against the activist dissenters, continued political instability could deepens, thus reforms basically needed would be resisted and inter-ministerial integration could be impeded.

The EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) risks exacerbating Tunisia's social and political tensions. Public concerns over sovereignty and the prioritization of EU demands over domestic needs have already sparked political debates and civil society mobilization. Several activists have been arrested for opposing and criticizing the authorities' violent practices and discrimination against Sub-Saharan migrants.

Moreover, the MoU's focus on irregular migration has marginalized vulnerable migrant groups, aggravating human rights concerns and damaging Tunisia's international reputation. The rise of authoritarian practices has become increasingly evident, with expanded powers granted to the judiciary and security forces. This shift has led to a surge in arrests and politically motivated trials targeting activists, intellectuals, and journalists. Additionally, the tightening of restrictions on political parties and civil society organizations has further diminished public freedoms, created a climate of fear and suppressed democratic expression.

G. Neocolonialism and Power Asymmetry in the EU-Tunisian MoU

1. Historical Context of Colonialism

French colonialism in Tunisia, influenced the country's post-colonial era. under the Treaty of Bardo in 1881 Tunisia became a French protectorate with remaining the administration of the Bey of Tunis, but later with La Marsa Convention in 1883, France had full control over Tunisia and allowed it to implement reforms “administratively, judicially, and financially if it deemed necessary” (Moore, 2010). France implemented reforms that disproportionately benefited settlers and French investors. For instance, fertile lands were expropriated and redistributed to French settlers, forcing many Tunisians to work on these lands for minimal wages (Moore, 2010). Furthermore, France exploited Tunisia's natural resources and modernized infrastructure, including railways and ports to facilitate the exports to Europe (Perkins, 2014). These policies marginalized local Tunisians, stifling the growth of their businesses and exacerbating economic inequalities. The

reforms also extended to the educational and cultural sectors, promoting the French language and culture while neglecting Arabic and religious traditions. The use of “Mission Civilisatrice for the French...(where) they sought to establish their culture as superior to the pre-existing local cultures” was standard practice. "Memories of la Mission Civilisatrice: Language Policy and Postcolonial National Identities in Tunisia and France." (Moore, 2010).

2. Post-Colonial Legacies and Development Challenges

Tunisia gained independence on March 20, 1956. It faced challenges to establish its national identity. French culture left its mark on language, education, and governance institutions. The French administrative structures were kept, including centralized control, legal codes, and bureaucratic practices persisted into the post-colonial era. The economy remains dependent on the French and European markets. Both agricultural and industrial production were historically geared toward meeting export demands rather than fostering local economic development, a trend that has persisted and constrained efforts to achieve self-sufficiency or diversified growth.

After gaining independence, Tunisia labor migration deepened, as the structural inequalities inherited from colonialism left the domestic economy unable to generate sufficient employment opportunities. Europe faced labor shortages, particularly after World War I, which created a demand for foreign workers. Migration became formalized through bilateral agreements with France during the 1960s and 1970s, which facilitated the recruitment of Tunisian workers for low-wage jobs in construction, manufacturing, and domestic services. These arrangements reflected a continuity of exploitative economic relationships, as Tunisia remained a supplier of inexpensive labor for Europe's benefit, while relying increasingly on remittances to sustain its economy. The 1995 Association Agreement marked the first formal framework for establishing a free trade area between the European Union (EU) and Tunisia, aiming to facilitate the entry of Tunisian products into European markets. However, the agreement did not yield significant economic benefits for Tunisia. Tunisian businesses, struggled to compete with their European counterparts, which were better equipped and heavily subsidized. As a result, the agreement did not provide mutual economic gains, instead deepening Tunisia's dependence on EU markets and reinforcing a trade

imbalance that primarily benefited European interests. These unequal dynamic highlights the EU's tendency to prioritize its own strategic and economic goals over promoting equitable development in its partnerships. Scholars argue that such agreements perpetuate unequal terms of trade, limiting Tunisia's ability to pursue independent economic policies (Hibou, 2006).

3. Economic Dependency

The concept of economic dependency, which examines the unequal relationship between developed and developing economies, helps explain Tunisia's enduring reliance on European markets. This dynamic is evident in Tunisia's trade patterns, where the country exports raw materials and low-value goods while importing higher value industrial products from Europe.

This kind of agreements continue to prioritize external market needs over local economic growth, maintaining disparities dating back to the colonial period. Agreements with the European Union frequently demonstrate this gap, as they are intended to address the strategic and economic interests of more developed countries. Such arrangements limit Tunisia's policy independence and impede its pursuit of long-term, self-sufficient economic development, reducing the country's role in the global economic system.

The Tunisian economy is currently underperforming compared to its potential. In the 1960s and 1970s, Tunisia experienced significant economic growth thanks to an import substitution model, and it continued to thrive in the 1990s after shifting to an export-oriented approach. However, challenges began to surface in the early 2000s, as the country struggled to boost productivity and keep up with the growth of global markets. These issues intensified public discontent and sparked the uprising in 2011. Over the preceding decade, economic vulnerabilities worsened due to slow reforms, external crises, and political dysfunction, resulting in a mere 0.9 percent growth rate. The lackluster performance of the Tunisian economy in 2023 is simply a continuation of a decade marked by weak factors that hinder economic activity. Growth has been confined to the public sector and the informal economy, while more dynamic sectors have seen a decline. Ongoing crises and political instability have taken a toll on the tourism industry, and various economic sectors have suffered from stagnation in industrial growth and a drop in phosphate

production.

4. Impact on vulnerable groups

Tunisia's economic vulnerability, significant debt, and dependence on external loans complicate the government's ability to completely dismiss these neoliberal policies. Tunisia's dependence on external financing to address its budget deficits is reinforced by the MoU, which fails to offer long-term solutions to the nation's fiscal challenges. Rather, it continues a cycle of borrowing and austerity, exacerbating the country's economic vulnerability. By adopting these measures, the authorities secure ongoing access to international funding and preserve relationships with influential economic partner. It continues its dependent on the institutions of the new colonial state and its associated alliances at the expense of marginalized groups. Including Black Tunisians and Sub-Saharan migrants, they are the most affected by these reforms because of their reliance on state subsidies and public services, and their frequent exploitation in low-wage industries. The neoliberal focus on "efficiency" and "competitiveness" sidelines the most vulnerable and exclude them from opportunities in the formal economy (World Bank, 2023).

The EU-Tunisia MoU focuses on border control, effectively turning Tunisia into a buffer zone for migration to Europe. Sub-Saharan migrants, especially those trying to reach Europe, experience systemic discrimination and exploitation in Tunisia. The MoU does not tackle their human rights or offer pathways to regularization, which leaves them at risk of exploitation in the informal economy. reinforces inequality, as marginalized labor lacks social protections. Furthermore, they don't benefit from insurance or social protection and a stable income. The informal economy impacts the state development not only people working in it. As a result, poverty cycles persist and the economic challenges get worsen.

The MoU emphasize on migration control without addressing the root causes of migration or the situation of migrants in Tunisia increases their vulnerability, as they are viewed more as a security concern than as individuals with rights. Its emphasis on migration control further sidelines sub-Saharan migrants and fails to tackle the structural inequalities experienced by Black Tunisians. By positioning Tunisia as a partner in Europe's migration management, the MoU places external demands above the country's domestic socio-economic needs, worsening existing

disparities.

The EU tends to structure agreements to align with its strategic interests, such as outsourcing border control, an approach that has been in place since the 1980s as a dominant force have the power to enforce and enact its rules and interests. In this context, the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed as a conditional agreement, where Tunisia is tasked with controlling its borders to prevent migrants from reaching frontline European states. In exchange, the EU provides Tunisia with the technical equipment needed to combat migration, as well as financial support.

The MoU exacerbate dependency rather than fostering fair partnership. Tunisia is instead obligated to implement neoliberal policies shaped by the external interests of the EU which have worsened socio-economic inequality, and limit Tunisia ability to negotiate terms that protect its sovereignty and ensure its developmental needs. These policies focus on economic development in urban and coastal regions, leaving marginalized areas such as southern Tunisia, home to many Black Tunisians, overlooked. This geographic oversight has deepened economic and social exclusion.

5. Understanding Neocolonialism in International Relations

Neocolonialism is exercising control over a country through indirect means, such as economic exploitation via unequal agreements, restructuring governance and political landscapes, or promoting foreign ideologies and identities, constitutes a form of indirect colonization. differs from traditional military colonization. As Kwame Nkrumah highlighted, neocolonialism “exerts control through economic or monetary means” while projecting a facade of independence (Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism, 1965). The term neocolonialism was first used after World War II to describe the ongoing dependency of former colonies on foreign powers. However, its meaning quickly evolved to encompass broader applications, referring to policies that benefit the powerful nations interests at the expense of local sovereignty and the prosperity of less developed countries. In the EU-Tunisia MoU, these dynamics are evident. The agreement conditions financial aid and technical assistance on Tunisia’s alignment with EU priorities, particularly in migration control, reinforcing dependency rather than fostering equitable development. This

approach, as critics argue, reflects the continuation of a system where powerful nations secure their interests “at the expense of the development of less advanced economies” (Rodney, 1972).

This strategy maintains a system in which the EU's economic and strategic interests take precedence over Tunisia's sovereignty and economic development (Amnesty International, 2023; EuroMed Rights, 2023). In this regard, the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) depicts a contemporary form of neocolonialism in international relations, in which financial and technical support conceals the reinforcing of inequality and external influence over local policies. The MoU puts Tunisia under pressure to develop policies and migration plans that line with EU goals rather than its own internal and societal requirements, hence reinforcing dependency (World Bank, 2023). In addition to the implications of externalizing EU borders, Tunisia diverts its equipment, human resources, and border control systems to serve European goals (Frontex, 2023). By acting as a gatekeeper, Tunisia bears the financial, logistical, and social burdens of implementation to ensure the decrease of migration pressure on EU member states (Amnesty International, 2023).

Neocolonialism continues to shape global relations. Unlike direct colonial rule, this system operates indirectly, relying on letting the less developed countries always dependent to the external policies, the 1995 EU-Tunisia Association Agreement, which facilitated European access to Tunisian markets but left Tunisian businesses unable to compete with European industries highlight this approach. these dynamics reveal the unequal balance of power between the two parties. Tunisia's reliance on foreign aid, investment and trade with powerful states or institutions such as the EU, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. these fundings and support are often conditioned upon implementing policies that primarily serve European interests, this manifest in the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) whether it represent genuine cooperation or a continuation of neo-colonial dynamics. The agreement has been introduced as a partnership but includes conditional economic support alongside migration management, yet it creates overwhelming benefits for the EU.

6. The MoU as a Soft Power Instrument of EU Influence

These features make the MoU function as an actual demonstration of soft power integration with neo-colonial strategies in modern international relations. Some soft power component interconnect with neocolonialism theory. Joseph Nye explains soft power as a diplomatic tool for entities to influence others by offering attractive ideas rather than forcing compliance. The MoU presents a continuity of the same previous agreements made between the EU and Tunisia and with its conditionality the MoU tends to create economic and political dependencies that maintain neo-colonial dynamics for the long term and limit Tunisia ability to act outside this relation for its own benefit and development. Some cultural aspects in soft power often adopt the story of the dominant power and maintain the historical power dynamics.

The EU-Tunisia MoU seeks to justify European impact while diminishing Tunisia's history with colonialism, through cultural diplomacy and the exchange educational programs promoting for the image of European culture and democratic values. The EU presents its governance model as a global standard or a moral authority which has may produce two consequences: the dominance of European ideals and unequal dynamics between the EU and Tunisia. This demonstrates a neo-colonial pattern by favoring European interests against Tunisian self-determination.

The MoU includes a promise of economic investment in Tunisia. However, this investment typically allows European corporations to execute projects that retain Europe's current trading position. Tunisian economic reliance on Europe persists under this agreement, which replicates previous colonial institutions that controlled economic systems for the benefit of colonizers. The MoU includes migrant cooperation clauses while controlling the European borders, which may be insufficient to meet both parties' needs. Such an approach demonstrates a neocolonial framework because the ruling power exercises policy control through collaborative techniques, preventing Tunisia from establishing its migratory governance framework freely.

The soft power features outlined in the EU-Tunisia MoU indicate how attraction and influence to preserve neocolonial partnerships. The EU provides assistance measures that perpetuate current power inequalities that limit Tunisia's autonomy and independence and the EU interests centered programs of soft power

keeps on reproducing neocolonial connections and cause a trust issue in international cooperation's and partnerships.

H. Long-Term Potential Consequences

1. Economic Impact and the Risk of Dependency

While the MoU aims to address migration challenges through financial assistance and cooperation, it risks escalating social unrest, undermining human rights, and threatening Tunisia's sovereignty. Critics argue that the agreement not only overlooks Tunisia's pressing economic and social challenges but also worsens existing inequalities. By tying economic aid and development objectives to Europe's strategic interests particularly migration control and energy cooperation the MoU reinforces Tunisia's dependence on external powers while sidelining crucial issues of sovereignty, social justice, and human rights.

Economic disparities had increased and the majority of Tunisians were now looking for opportunities abroad, thus increasing further the socioeconomic strain and the phenomenon of the 'brain drain' Rather of stabilizing the economy and creating a new employment market through EU agreements and partnership, these arrangements have exacerbated Tunisia's migratory dilemma, forcing more people to leave the nation in pursuit of better opportunities. Although the MoU provides financial help, it does not address the root causes of economic insecurity, especially as the money is contingent on migratory control. This circumstance maintains Tunisia reliant on EU external assistance and diminishes its ability to negotiate favorable terms that benefit its own interests, limiting the country's ability to create independent policies that are in line with its societal needs and development goals. The continued pressure on civil society is likely to cause social friction and resistance.

2. Human Rights and Accountability Concerns

The MoU lacks accountability mechanisms to ensure adherence to human rights standards, particularly in light of ongoing reports of human rights violations, including the deaths of some Sub-Saharan migrants. This absence of accountability could harm Tunisia's international standing and its relationships with other nations and organizations.

Tunisian public and civil society organizations have expressed major concerns about the MoU, including its transparency, constitutionality, and impact on migrant rights. Human rights organizations, legal experts, and activists have condemned the deal for its lack of accountability procedures, suggesting that it could lead to more abuses against migrants, particularly Sub-Saharan Africans, who are already facing increased violence and discrimination in Tunisia. Reports of detentions, forced deportation, and migrant deaths highlight the humanitarian costs of Tunisia's rising engagement in EU migration enforcement.

Several civil society organizations, particularly the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES), have aggressively criticized the pact, arguing it undermines Tunisia's sovereignty by putting EU interests ahead of national issues. Protests and lobbying attempts have erupted in response to the government's handling of migration concerns, particularly the expulsion of migrants to desert regions along Tunisia's borders, which has sparked widespread condemnation from international human rights organizations. These rising tensions suggest that the MoU may become a source of increased political and social instability, straining the relationship between the government and civil society.

3. Geopolitical Pressures and Tunisia's Sovereignty

Tunisia's growing involvement in EU migration policies reveals broader geopolitical trends, particularly the role of imperialist powers and international financial institutions. External pressures, particularly from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have put Tunisia in a difficult position, compelling the government to balance populist claims to sovereignty with the necessity to maintain previous administrations' neoliberal economic strategy.

This mixed approach produces internal inconsistencies. While Tunisian leaders openly emphasize the importance of sovereignty and national independence, their actions, such as accepting conditional EU money and imposing migrant control measures that line with European goals, demonstrate continued compliance with external pressures. This contradiction in policy weakens public trust in government and promotes domestic opposition to EU-supported migration programs.

4. The Security-Migration Nexus: Risks of Militarization, Repeating Previous Mistakes

The MoU's emphasis on migration restriction has become increasingly linked to security concerns, reflecting the EU's overall goal of perceiving migration as a security danger rather than a humanitarian or economic one. This viewpoint has resulted in increased militarization of border control, with Tunisia expecting to improve its surveillance, policing, and detaining capabilities as part of its cooperation with European authorities. The use of European-funded border patrols, surveillance technology, and security forces to monitor migration raises serious concerns about human rights breaches, particularly the treatment of detained migrants. The possibility of arbitrary detention, racial profiling, and excessive use of force increases as migration policies become more tightly tied to national security measures. Although Tunisia's government structure differs from Libya's, the risk of migrants being subjected to comparable abuses as a result of enhanced enforcement tactics remains a big issue. In the lack of clear accountability systems and control, Tunisia may unintentionally become involved in systemic human rights breaches, undermining its international position.

The EU-Tunisia MoU adds to a long history of misguided migration policies that have failed to provide long-term solutions. The 2017 EU-Libya MoU, while lauded for curbing migratory flows, resulted in major human rights violations, boosted smuggling networks, and put refugees into desperate situations (Amnesty International, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Similarly, the Tunisia MoU threatens to perpetuate exploitation cycles, increase migration-related causes, and create economic instability.

This deal replicates previous policy failures by prioritizing European border security over long-term solutions, resulting in traffickers adapting, new migratory routes emerging, and humanitarian problems deepening. Without a dramatic shift toward development-oriented migration management, Tunisia will continue to experience migration pressures, economic dependency, and rising domestic instability.

The increasing engagement of external powers in Tunisia's migratory governance creates serious questions about sovereignty, debt dependence, and the conflict between nationalist rhetoric and neoliberal policy decisions. If Tunisia does

not play an active part in developing migration policies that are in line with its national interests, it risks becoming locked in a cycle of reactive, externally imposed accords that do not address the root reasons of migration.



VI. CONCLUSION

The Study investigated the consequences of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the European Union (EU) and Tunisia, with a particular emphasis on migrant rights, regional relations, and the dynamics of neocolonial governance. Using quantitative and qualitative techniques, beside case studies to provide more insights and explanation of previous and in effect agreements between the EU and non-EU countries as a part of trend approach of externalizing borders. the study uncovers the MoU's multidimensional nature, showing how it reflects the EU's geopolitical interests while also posing serious obstacles to human rights and regional stability.

The MoU embodies the EU's practice of outsourcing migration control to Tunisia, which reflects a larger trend in European migration policy (Ben Salah, 2023). This method has major ramifications for migrants and refugees' rights, typically prioritizing border security and migration control to stop the flow over the protection of people fleeing persecution or seeking better prospects. This tactic illustrates a pragmatic yet, ethically questionable focus on short-term fixes rather than long-term stability and adherence to the rule of law. The case studies of Albania Italy Protocol and Libya Italy MOU reflect this approach despite the difference in the political context and motivations they share same interests of the EU and particularly Italy

The qualitative research highlights severe issues regarding how sub-Saharan migrants are treated in Tunisia. Interviews with migrants and stakeholders reveal that the MoU's implementation has increased vulnerabilities and resulted in human rights breaches, as it worsened the situation of both migrants and local community, taking into consideration the backsliding in democracy and the human rights situation in Tunisia since 2021. This emphasizes on the importance of incorporating human rights protections within migration management frameworks. According to the research, the MoU has altered Tunisia's relations with neighboring nations as well as the EU. Especially that the Tunisian President has already adopted an anti-migration

rhetoric which sparked tension with sub-Saharan African countries. And with the implementation of the MoU, it could affect Tunisia diplomatic ties in the region and cause more tension.

The European Union-Tunisia MoU is primarily driven by Europe's goal of outsourcing migration control to Tunisia, reducing crossings via the Central Mediterranean. Beyond migration, the EU seeks to maintain geopolitical influence in North Africa, protect its economic interests, and prevent instability that could impact Europe (Amnesty International, 2023; Frontex, 2023). For Tunisia, the agreement increases border control responsibilities, making it Europe's gatekeeper while lacking the necessary resources. The agreement provides financial and technical support for border security, but it does little to build long-term institutional capacity. Tunisia remains dependent on EU funding, and there is little transparency in how resources are managed. Instead of strengthening governance, the deal aligns Tunisia's migration policies with European priorities rather than national needs.

It also fuels human rights concerns, with reports of migrant mistreatment and repression of civil society groups. There has been a rise in human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests, forced expulsions, and inhumane conditions in detention centers. Migrants, particularly sub-Saharan Africans, face growing hostility, fueled in part by political rhetoric. The deal prioritizes security over humanitarian protection, worsening the situation for vulnerable communities. Regionally, it, risks social unrest, and could push migration underground rather than stopping it. Migrants and smugglers will only change their networks and adapt with the different migration controls by the EU and its partners such as the Libyan militias.

Civil society groups and international organizations have widely condemned the MoU, arguing that it legitimizes Tunisia's crackdown on migrants and suppresses human rights advocacy. The UN and rights groups have called for greater transparency and respect for international human rights obligations. The MoU risks aggravating the situation of immigrants and revolve the black There has been a rise in human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests, forced expulsions, and inhumane conditions in detention centers. Migrants, particularly sub-Saharan Africans, face growing hostility, fueled in part by political rhetoric. The deal prioritizes security over humanitarian protection, worsening the situation for vulnerable communities. The condemnation was towards the Tunisian president's racist speech against sub-

Saharans. Many NGOs face government restrictions, and activists have been targeted for criticizing the agreement and helping the refugees, reflecting a broader policy to criminalize associative work and limit civil society freedoms. Through the suppression of dissent and the reduction of civic participation possibilities, this crackdown essentially restricts people's ability to organize and promote social and political change. By targeting activists, the government sends a clear message that it will not tolerate any challenges to its authority, eroding the country's democratic foundation. These measures jeopardize civil society's crucial role in promoting openness, accountability, and human rights in Tunisia (UNHCR, 2023).

Ultimately, while the EU frames it as a stabilizing move, it turns into a tool for political repression it reinforces authoritarian governance and deepens existing tensions. Additionally, it might exacerbate social unrest and damage Tunisia's diplomatic ties with its neighbors. Tunisia might come under international scrutiny and possibly lose EU cooperation in other areas if abuses go unpunished. In the end, the deal might exacerbate instability rather than lessen it if it does not adopt a rights-based approach. the statement of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human which condemned the Tunisian authorities and called them to stop all forms of harassment and persecution of political opponents and civil society activists.

The analysis further highlights the neocolonial governance aspects present in the EU-Tunisia partnership. The power dynamics at play in the MoU reflect historical patterns of domination. The agreement has been introduced as a partnership but includes conditional economic support alongside migration management which reinforce dependency rather than fostering equitable development. The EU must emphasize the protection of migrants' rights in all migration agreements, ensuring that partner nations adhere to international human rights norms. It is critical to establish independent monitoring methods that hold all parties accountable. The foreign dominance is obvious in the Tunisian diplomacy attitude towards EU dealing with its nationals. For instance, the weak performance in adequately confronting the killings and torture of their citizens in Italian prison facilities. The government's response to these instances has been delayed and insufficient, with no calls for responsibility or effective protections for its nationals abroad. Furthermore, Tunisia's participation in international discussions about human rights and migration is generally reactive rather than proactive, with no firm stance

or clear diplomatic strategy. This passive attitude weakens Tunisia's global stature and exposes its nationals to violations without strong advocacy from their own government.

The European Parliament's growing opposition to Tunisia's attitude to migration raises serious questions about the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding. In February 2025, some Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) called for a suspension of financial support related to migration claiming that Tunisia's failure to achieve critical human rights standards jeopardizes the EU's migration policies. They cautioned that continued cooperation with Tunisia under these conditions could jeopardize the EU's commitment to human rights and democratic values (European Parliament, 2025). This situation highlights the vulnerability of migration partnerships based on externalization policies, necessitating critical discussions about accountability, human rights protection, and the ethical implications of delegating migration control to third countries with fragile democratic structures.

Rather than focusing exclusively on border control, the EU should invest in sustainable development programs in the countries of origin and transit to address the underlying reasons of migration, such as poverty, inequality, and political instability. There is an urgent need for long-term cooperation, which would include measures that assist Tunisia's economic stability and human capital development while simultaneously addressing Europe's labor market requirements.

Balanced Regional Engagement: The EU should take a more equitable approach to regional relations, cultivating genuine partnerships that respect North African nations' sovereignty and development priorities. This includes avoiding policies that divide neighboring states. The EU must strike a careful balance, failure to do so risks degradation of Tunisia's democratic institutions and civil society. The EU often shifts the burden of migration management to less developed countries, leveraging an unequal balance of power that allows it to exert significant pressure on its partners. This dynamic is evident in the case of Tunisia, where the EU's strategic and financial influence facilitates the imposition of migration policies that primarily serve European interests, often at the expense of equitable cooperation or respect for local priorities.

Migration agreements should be negotiated and implemented publicly, with

involvement from civil society, migrants, and affected communities for Transparency and accountability. This method would help to mitigate the neocolonial repercussions of such accords.

Review of Funding Mechanisms Financial assistance should be reorganized to ensure that it is aligned with long-term development goals rather than short-term migration control plans. Funding should be tied to the protection of human rights and the promotion of good governance.

Alternatives to Migration Management. Instead of relying on border externalization techniques that benefit European interests, Tunisia may advocate for more sustainable migrant governance models that are consistent with its own development goals. Possible options including bilateral Labor Agreements: Rather than limiting migration, Tunisia might explore legal job channels in Europe, allowing for controlled migration flows while benefiting from remittances and skills exchange.

Regional Cooperation: Strengthening cooperation with African Union members and Mediterranean nations to promote common migration policies that prioritize development, security, and human rights protections over rigid border control.

Investment in Local Development: Allocating EU funds to job creation, vocational training, and entrepreneurship projects to alleviate the economic issues driving migration.

Enhanced Legal Protections for Migrants: Ensure that domestic migration policies comply with international human rights norms in order to prevent arbitrary detention, abuse, and deportation without due process.

VII. REFERENCES

BOOKS

- ANDERSSON, R. (2014). **Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine migration and the business of bordering Europe** (pp. 78–95). University of California Press.
- BARNES, J. (2022). Torturous journeys: Cruelty, international law, and pushbacks and pullbacks over the Mediterranean Sea. **Journal of Migration and Human Security**, 1(2), 45–67.
- BARON, J., & SARAGIH, H. M. (2023). The impact of externalization of border controls on the human rights of refugees in the Italian-Libyan Mediterranean Sea. **Jurnal Inovasi Ilmu Sosial dan Politik (JISoP)**, 5(1), 89–98.
- BERNTSEN, E. (2023). The Italy-Albania protocol: Humanitarian implications and international law. **European Journal of Migration and Law**, 25(2), 123–140.
- BETTS, A. (2011). **Global migration governance** (pp. 1–320). Oxford University Press.
- BICCHI, F. (2019). **European foreign policy-making toward North Africa: Normative power or realist interests?**
- BURSON, B., & Cantor, D. J. (Eds.). (2016). **Human rights and the refugee definition: Comparative legal practice and theory** (pp. 1–360).
- Collyer, M. (2016). **Geographies of migration: Settlement, transit, and new mobility** (pp. 1–250).
- DE GENOVA, N. (2017). **The borders of "Europe": Autonomy of migration, tactics of bordering** (pp. 1–400). Duke University Press.
- DEL SARTO, R. A. (2021). **Borderlands: Europe and the Mediterranean Middle East**. Oxford University Press.

- EECKHOUT, P., & Lopez-Escudero, M. (Eds.). (2016). **The European Union's external action in times of crisis** (pp. 1–350).
- GEDDES, A. (2015). **The politics of migration and immigration in Europe** (pp. 1–250). SAGE Publications.
- HAILBRONNER, K., & Thym, D. (Eds.). (2016). **EU immigration and asylum law: Text and commentary** (2nd ed., Vol. 3: EU asylum law) (pp. 1–420).
- JUSS, S. S. (Ed.). (2018). **Human rights and border control** (pp. 1–380). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- LAVENEX, S., & Uçarer, E. M. (2019). **Migration and the externalization of European borders** (pp. 1–275).
- LAZARIDIS, G., & Wadia, K. (Eds.). (2015). **The securitisation of migration in the EU: Debates since 9/11**. Palgrave Macmillan.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137480583>
- MURPHY, E. (2016). **The Tunisian Sahel: Islam under secular rule**.
- MUDDE, C. (2019). **The far right today**. (pp. 1–160). Polity Press.
- NYE, J. S. (2004). **Soft power: The means to success in world politics**. PublicAffairs
- ZAIOTTI, R. (2016). **Externalizing migration management: Europe, North America and the spread of 'remote control' practices** (pp. 1–320).
- ZOUBIR, Y. H. (2020). **The geopolitics of North Africa: A region in transition**.

ARTICLES

- AIDA, M., & RIZZO, A. (2021). Migration policies in North Africa: Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. **Migration Studies**, 9(4), 597–619. <https://doi.org>
- ABDERAZZAK, M. (2018). Tunisia: Migration, asylum and human rights. **European Journal of Migration and Law**, 20(1), 1-26.
- AGHRES, R., & Ben Hamida, F. (2022). The role of civil society in protecting migrant rights in Tunisia: A critical analysis. **Journal of Migration and**

Refugee Studies, 4(1), 45-62.

Al-SAID, N. (2023). The impact of the EU-Tunisia MoU on human rights and migration governance. **Mediterranean Politics**, 28(1), 90-112.

BIALASIEWICZ, L. (2012). Off-shoring and out-sourcing the borders of Europe: Libya and EU border work in the Mediterranean. **Geopolitics**, 17(4), 843–866. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2012.660579>

BORDERLINE SICILIA. (2021, December 7). The story of Abdel Latif, from crossing the sea to dying in Rome, fixed to a hospital bed. **Borderline Sicilia**. (2021, December 10). Justice for Wissem Ben Abdellatif, a suspicious death in the Italian detention system.

BOUZID, M. (2022). The impact of the 2011 revolution on migration policies in Tunisia: From political transformation to socio-economic challenges. **Journal of North African Studies**, 27(3), 453-471.

BURATTI, T. (2021). The ethical implications of outsourcing migration management: Examining the EU-Libya agreement. **Journal of Migration and Human Security**, 9(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2331502421995353>

CARRERA, S., & GEDDES, A. (2023). The EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding: A geopolitical migration pact? **European Journal of Migration and Law**, 25(1), 14–36.

CARRERA, S., & STEFAN, M. (2024). Compliance or complicity? An analysis of the EU-Tunisia deal in the context of the externalisation of migration control. **Netherlands International Law Review**. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40802-024-00251-x>

CASSARINO, J. P. (2014). Channelled policy transfers: EU-Tunisia interactions on migration matters. **European Journal of Migration and Law**, 16(1), 97–123.

CASSARINO, J. P., & Del Sarto, R. A. (2018). Migration and border management in the Mediterranean: Shifting the crisis to the periphery. **Cambridge Review of International Affairs**.

CAVANNAUGH, R. R. (2021). The politics of migration in Tunisia: Understanding

the dynamics of migration policy-making in a changing political landscape. **Mediterranean Politics**, 26(1), 53-71.

ChATELARD, A.-L. (2017). The EU's externalization of migration control: Implications for human rights and accountability. **European Journal of Migration and Law**, 19(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718166-12340044>

ChATAIL, V. (2019). The role of international organizations in the governance of migration: An EU perspective. **European Journal of Migration and Law**, 21(3), 295–315. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718166-12340006>

FAKHRY, M. (2018). Tunisia's role in the EU external migration policy: migration law, illegal practices, and their impact on human rights. **Journal of International Migration and Integration**, 19(3), 623-641. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0596-7>

FAKHRY, T. (2023). Externalization of migration control: A critical assessment of the EU-Tunisia memorandum of understanding. **European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)**. <https://ecre.org/externalization-of-migration-control-a-critical-assessment-of-the-eu-tunisia-memorandum-of-understanding>

FASANI, F., & FRATTINI, T. (2020). The economic impact of immigration on the receiving countries: Evidence from the EU. **International Labour Review**, 159(2), 181-207. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ilr.12234>

FARGUES, P., & FANDRICH, C. (2012). Migration after the Arab Spring: The case of Tunisia. **Mediterranean Politics**, 17(2), 165–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2012.693520>

FERNANDO-GONZOLA, E. (2023). The EU's informal readmission agreements with third countries on migration: Effectiveness over principles? **European Journal of Migration and Law**, 25(1), 83–108.

FERNANDEZ-MOLINA, I. (2019). Morocco and the EU: From a willing partner to a strategic bargainer. **Mediterranean Politics**, 24(3), 371-391.

FRELICK, B., KYSEL, I. M., & PODKUL, J. (2016). The impact of externalization of migration controls on the rights of asylum seekers and other migrants.

- Journal on Migration and Human Security**, 4(4), 190–220.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/233150241600400402>
- FTDES. (2023). The state of migration and human rights in Tunisia: An analysis of current challenges. **Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights**.
<https://www.ftdes.net/>
- FTDES. (2025). Ne laissez pas la maternité servir de tremplin au racisme: Le racisme n'est pas un point de vue. **Forum Tunisien des Droits Économiques et Sociaux**.
<https://ftdes.net/ar/ne-laissez-pas-la-maternite-servir-de-tremplin-au-racisme-le-racisme-nest-pas-un-point-de-vue/>
- GATTI, M. (2022). On ‘safety’ and EU externalization of borders. **European Journal of Migration and Law**, 24(4), 570–593.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/15718166-24040005>
- GLOBAL DETENTION PROJECT. (2014, May 20). Immigration detention in Tunisia: Shrouded in secrecy. **Global Detention Project**.
<https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/africa/tunisia>
- GRWATCH. (2020, December 1). Tunisia – A stop for forced immigration from Europe. **GRWATCH**.
<https://grwatch.org/tunisia-stop-forced-immigration-europe>
- HAGE, G. (2021). Migration and human rights in the Mediterranean: The case of Tunisia. **International Journal of Human Rights**, 25(7), 1055–1072.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2021.1973731>
- HUYSMANS, J. (2000). The European Union and the securitization of migration. **JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies**, 38(5), 751–777.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00263>
- JBILI, A., & Enders, K. (1996). The Association Agreement between Tunisia and the European Union. **Finance & Development**, 33(3), 24–27.
<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/1996/09/jbili.htm>
- JBILI, A., & Enders, K. (2005). The Association Agreement between Tunisia and the European Union. **International Monetary Fund**.
<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/tn/2005/tn0501.pdf>
- KADDOUSI, A. (2022). The role of Tunisian NGOs in migration management:

Challenges and prospects. **African Journal of International and Comparative Law**, 30(3), 358–376.
<https://doi.org/10.3366/ajicl.2022.0031>

KHEMIRI, M. M., & Bahloul, M. (2021). The erosion of civil liberties in Tunisia: Trends and challenges. **Arab Journal of Political Science**, 10(2), 21–39.
<https://doi.org/10.12816/0059084>

KHOSRAVI, S. (2018). The politics of migration control: European responses to irregular migration. **Journal of International Migration and Integration**, 19(4), 799–815. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0557-1>

KRUGER, L.-T., & RATKA, E. (2014). A new response to a changing neighbourhood? The perception of European policies in Tunisia after the Arab Spring. **L'Europe en Formation**, 2014(1), 9–25.
<https://doi.org/10.3917/lefur.141.0009>

LAVENEX, S. (2019). The external dimension of European migration governance: Norms, policy, and power. **Journal of European Public Policy**, 26(9), 1444–1463. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1660082>

LAVENEX, S., & Kunz, R. (2022). Migration and security: The European Union's external governance in North Africa. **Journal of Common Market Studies**, 60(2), 225–243.

LEONARD S., & KAUNERT, C. (2021). The external dimension of EU migration policy: The case of the EU-Turkey deal. **Journal of European Integration**, 43(1), 1–16.

LIXI, L. (2022). EU external migration policies in North Africa: Fragile states and the limits of partnership. **Mediterranean Politics**, 27(4), 547–568.

MAHFOUDH, K., & KHACHNAOUI, A. (2022). Migrants' rights in Tunisia: Civil society responses to EU policies. **Human Rights Review**, 23(4), 647–666.

MAZZOCCHI, A. (2023). The EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding: A critical assessment of its implications for migration management and human rights. **European Journal of Migration and Law**, 25(1), 20–37.

- MELONI, G. (2023). Nationalism and migration: The rise of the right in Italy. **Italian Political Science Review**, 55(1), 85–102.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/ipo.2023.6>
- PAOLETTI, E. (2011). Power relations and international migration: The case of Italy and Libya. **Political Studies**, 59(2), 269–289.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2010.00851.x>
- RICHARD, Y., & VAN HAMME, G. (2013). The European Union as an actor in international relations: A geographical assessment of European actorness. **L'Espace géographique (English Edition)**, 42(1), 15–30.
<https://doi.org/10.3917/eg.421.0015>
- SAMET, K., & ChAABANE, A. (2019). Innovation and economic development: Case of Tunisia. **International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues**, 9(5), 141–146.
- SHA'ATH, H., & RAACH, F. (2024). Cooperation within reason: Tunisia's approach to asylum and readmission. **European Journal of Migration and Law**, 26(2), 179–196 <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718166-12340176>
- SIJILMASSI, M. (2023). The EU-Tunisia partnership: Migration and human rights in the Mediterranean. **Mediterranean Politics**, 28(2), 243–261.
- STOCK, I. (2019). Externalizing migration management: Europe's migration deals with North African countries. **Mediterranean Politics**, 24(1), 81–100.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2017.1358909>
- VARELA, M. (2018). Tunisia's role in the EU external migration policy: Crimmigration law, illegal practices, and their impact on human rights. **Journal of International Migration and Integration**, 20(1), 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0596-7>
- ZARDO, F. (2020). Migration, security, and Tunisia's crisis of governance: The EU's migration policies as a source of contestation. **The International Spectator**, 55(4), 83–99.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1811901>

ELECTRONIC SOURCES

CARRERA, S., & CORTINOVIS, R. (2021). The impact of the EU's external migration policies on human rights. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 59(4), 834-849. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13150>

COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN UNION. (2022, February 3). Operationalization of the Pact – Action plans for strengthening comprehensive migration partnerships with priority countries of origin and transit: Draft Action Plan: Tunisia (Council Document No. 11392/2/21 REV 2). Brussels.

MAJIDI, N. (2022). Tunisia country report: The role of Tunisia in migration control and management (D5.2, WP5). ASILE Project. https://www.asileproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/D5.2_WP5-Tunisia-Country-Report-Final.pdf

URL-1 “The securitization of migration in Tunisia”, Al-FORUM, <https://al-forum.org/ar/the-securitization-of-migration-in-tunisia/> (Access Date: 25 February 2025)

URL-2 “Lock-up and expel: The security drift of the migration policy in Italy [Enfermer et expulser: La dérive sécuritaire de la politique migratoire en Italie]”, Al-FORUM, <https://al-forum.org/fr/lock-up-and-expel-the-security-drift-of-the-migration-policy-in-italy/> (Access Date: 20 September 2024)

URL-3 “Italy: New decree targeting NGOs will endanger thousands of lives”, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/11/italy-new-decree-targeting-ngos-will-endanger-thousands-of-lives/>, (Access Date: 18 November 2018)

URL-4 “Tunisia: A turning point for human rights?”, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/report-tunisia/> (Access Date: 2023)

- URL-5 “EU/Tunisia: Agreement on migration 'makes EU complicit' in abuses against asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants”, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/07/eu-tunisia-agreement-on-migration-makes-eu-complicit-in-abuses-against-asylum-seekers-refugees-and-migrants/> (Access Date: 17 July 2023)
- URL-6 “The EU-Libya migration deal: A decade of abuse”, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org> (Access Date: 02 February 2023)
- URL-7 “Albania-Italy deal on migration raises serious human rights concerns”, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org> (Access Date: 08 November 2023)
- URL-8 “Tunisia: Repressive crackdown on civil society organizations following months of escalating violence against migrants and refugees”, Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/05/tunisia-crackdown-on-civil-society-violence-against-migrants/> (Access Date: 05 May 2023)
- URL-9 “Tunisia seeks UNESCO recognition for abolition of slavery”, Anadolu Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr> (Access Date: December 2018)
- URL-10 “Italy signs deal with Albania to house migrants in detention centers”, Associated Press, <https://apnews.com> (Access Date: 08 November 2023)
- URL-11 “Charting the radical right’s influence on EU foreign policy”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org> (Access Date: April 2024)
- URL-12 “Signing of the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement between the European Communities and Tunisia”, European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_95_19 (Access Date: 01 December 1995)
- URL-13 “Commission announces almost €127 million in support of the

implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding with Tunisia and in line with the 10-point plan for Lampedusa”, European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_5423 (Access Date: 22 September 2023)

URL-14 “Implementing the Pact: Strengthening migration partnerships”, European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_3131 (Access Date: 27 January 2023)

URL-15 “EU-COM migration external cooperation initiatives (Document No. 9132/22)”, European Commission, EUROPEAN COMMISSION. EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership. <https://ec.europa.eu> (Access Date: 16 July 2023)

URL-17 “Legal implications of the Italy-Albania migration agreement”, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, <https://ecre.org/ecre-preliminary-comments-on-the-italy-albania-deal/> (Access Date: 09 November 2023)

URL-18 “The EU-Tunisia deal: A threat to human rights and civil society”, EuroMed Rights, <https://www.euromedrights.org> (Access Date: 13 September 2024)

URL-19 “EU-Turkey Statement & Action Plan. Legislative Train Schedule”, European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu> (Access Date: 03 May 2024)

URL-20 “EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding”, European Parliament Think Tank, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu> (Access Date: 11 September 2023)

URL-21 “Joint statement: Tunisia’s criminalization of migration activism must end”,

FIDH & Euromed Rights, <https://www.fidh.org> (Access Date: 13 September 2023)

URL-22 “I can’t return home’: A human rights assessment of Tunisia’s response to migration”, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/10/04/i-cant-return-home/human-rights-assessment-tunisias-response-migration> (Access Date: 04 October 2022)

URL-23 “Tunisia: No safe haven for Black African migrants, refugees”, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/07/19/tunisia-no-safe-haven-black-african-migrants-refugees> (Access Date: 19 July 2023)

URL-24 “Tunisia: Racist violence targets Black migrants, refugees”, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/10/tunisia-racist-violence-targets-black-migrants-refugees> (Access Date: 10 March 2023)

URL-25 “Italy’s offshore migration deal with Albania violates rights”, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/01/italys-dodgy-detention-deal-albania> (Access Date: 01 February 2024)

URL-26 “Tunisia: EU’s migration policies fuel abuse”, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/07/01/tunisia/eus-migration-policies-fuel-abuse> (Access Date: 8 September 2023)

URL-27 “Tunisia: Crackdown on migration activists continues”, Human Rights

Watch, <https://www.hrw.org> (Access Date: 17 May 2024)

URL-28 “Italy: European Committee on Torture says detained migrants given psychotropic drugs”, InfoMigrants, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/61771/italy-european-committee-on-torture-says-detained-migrants-given-psychotropic-drugs> (Access Date: 14 December 2023)

URL-29 “Tunisia arrests human rights activist who defended migrants”, InfoMigrants, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/56917/tunisia-arrests-human-rights-activist-who-defended-migrants>. (Access Date: 7 May 2024)

URL-30 “Migration in the Mediterranean: Trends and challenges in Tunisia”, International Organization for Migration, <https://www.iom.int/countries/tunisia> 2022

URL-31 “IOM Tunisia launches voluntary return and reintegration program for migrants”, International Organization for Migration, <https://www.iom.int> (Access Date: February 2025)

URL-32 “Migration in Hungary”, International Organization for Migration, <https://hungary.iom.int>

URL-33 “World migration report 2022”, International Organization for Migration, <https://www.iom.int/world-migration-report-2022>

URL-34 “A damaging deal: Abuses, departures from Tunisia continue following EU agreement”, Mixed Migration Centre, <https://mixedmigration.org/news/a-damaging-deal-abuses-departures-from-tunisia-continue-following-eu-agreement> (Access Date: 20 September 2023)

URL-35 “Report on Italy’s detention centers and treatment of migrants”, Council of Europe. Committee for the Prevention of Torture, . <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-italy-detention-centers/1234567890>

URL-36 “Sub-Saharan African migrants in Tunisia: Geo-racialized security and the local revival of anti-blackness”, Noria Research, <https://noria-research.com/mena/sub-saharan-african-migrants-in-tunisia-geo-racialized-security-and-the-local-revival-of-antiblackness/> (Access Date:

14 January 2025)

URL-37 “European support for human rights violations in Tunisia 'must end'”, Statewatch, <https://www.statewatch.org/news/2024/october/european-support-for-human-rights-violations-in-tunisia-must-end/> (Access Date: 4 October 2020)

URL-38 “Deep and comprehensive dependency: How a trade agreement with the EU could devastate the Tunisian economy”, Transnational Institute, <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/deep-and-comprehensive-dependency> (Access Date: 8 December 2020)

URL-39 “Global trends: Forced displacement in 2020”, UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/global-trends-2022> (Access Date: 14 June 2023)

URL-40 “Tunisia economic monitor: Addressing vulnerability and inequality”, World Bank, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099838011032326761/pdf/IDU0b66401ea0d71b04eb00adb20a93d03ca730e.pdf?utm_source Fall 2023

RESUME

Name and Surname: Dorra Bessais

Education:

- 2020 National Fundamental Bachelor's Degree: Language Literature and English Civilization Faculty of Human and Social Sciences of Tunis
- 2022 Current Master's Degree Student: Political Science and International Relations Istanbul Aydin University

Work Experience:

- 2018 Executive Assistant: International Academy of Arbitration and Mediation Carthage AIMAC

Publications:

- Bessais, D. (2024). *Peace and conflict in Africa: The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon*. International Research Journal of Modernization in Engineering, Technology and Science, 6(12), 4231. <https://doi.org/10.56726/IRJMETs65455>
- Bessais, D. (2025, February 20). *Utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill's ethical influence and critics* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 5147979). Social Science Research Network. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5147979

Languages:

- Arabic (Native)
- English (Fluent/Advanced)
- French (Fluent/Advanced)
- Turkish (Intermediate)

Skills:

- Computer skills (Microsoft Excell, Word, Powerpoint)
- Cross-cultural communication
- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Adaptability in fast-paced environments

