

# Chapter 3

## Hindering Democracy Through Migration Policies? An Analysis of EU External Migration Policies' Impacts on the Democratisation of Morocco



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### 3.1 Introduction

Although democracy promotion is an important element of the EU's external migration policies embedded in the 'root-causes' approach (Faustini-Torres, 2020), there is very little academic knowledge about its effects on this policy field. Within the EU policy narrative, the lack of democracy has been mainly seen as a driver of migration and the democratic development of Southern Mediterranean countries (SMCs)<sup>1</sup> as a favourable condition for the EU's goals of stemming migration at the source (Faustini-Torres, 2020). This implies that, at least in rhetorical terms, the EU intends to have a positive effect on the democratisation of these countries. However, when it comes to policy practices, little is known about the impacts of EU external migration policies on the democratisation of SMCs.

According to the literature, a gap between EU rhetoric and action in this field could be expected (Bicchi, 2009, 2010; Dimitrovova, 2010; Völkel, 2014; Kostanyan, 2017), mainly due to the stability-vs-democratisation dilemma faced by the EU in its external action (Khalifa-Isaac, 2013; Börzel, 2015; Kostanyan, 2017). Furthermore, "migration governance is known to be a field where norms and practices diverge dramatically" (Fernández-Molina & De Larramendi, 2020, p. 7). In light of this, this chapter presents itself as an attempt to start uncovering the effects of EU external migration policies on SMCs' democratic development by moving away from policy narratives and focusing on policy practices. The turn to policy practices is done in two stages.

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<sup>1</sup>Here we focus on the countries of Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia.

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The first step consists of suggesting an innovative theoretical framework for empirically analysing the links between these two macro-processes of international affairs. This is done through bridge-building, that is, by bringing together fields of research that have remained rather apart: democratisation, autocratic resilience, and the politics of international migration. The insights, analytical frames and conceptual tools provided by these three bodies of literature combined have allowed the formulation of two arguments that enlighten our theoretical understanding of the mechanisms linking these two macro-processes.

The second step involves applying the suggested framework to Morocco and assessing the validity of arguments for this case-study, which is considered paradigmatic among SMCs (Den Hertog, 2017; El Qadim, 2010). On the one hand, Morocco has been constantly targeted by EU external migration policies and has been “cooperating” with the EU in the management of migration flows for the last 25 years. This does not imply that Morocco should be seen as a mere object of EU policies but rather as a subject with the capacity for action, negotiation, and interests (El Qadim, 2010). Indeed, the “externalisation” of EU migration policies towards this country, should not be viewed as a simple case of policy transfer, but rather as a “border security gaming” (Andersson & Keen, 2019). On the other hand, even though King Mohammed VI adopted some democratic demands made during the “Arab Uprisings”, this did not represent a radical step towards political change. In fact, authors refer to Morocco as a case of stalled democratisation (Cavatorta, 2015, 2016) and competitive authoritarianism (Hill, 2016; Szmolka, 2014).<sup>2</sup> For this reason, Morocco has also been a target for EU policies of democracy promotion, at least in rhetorical terms.

## 3.2 How “Externalisation” Meets Democratisation: A Theoretical Account

### 3.2.1 *The External Dimension of Democratisation*

Democratisation is often seen as a “domestic affair” (Schmitter, 2004). However, in the last two decades, several works have looked at how external actors and factors can influence internal political processes (Leininger, 2010; Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010). According to the model developed by Levitsky and Way (2005, 2006, 2010),<sup>3</sup> two main elements explain variations in Western influence on political change: leverage and linkage. Leverage refers to the external actors’ capacity to

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<sup>2</sup>Even though it is defined as a Parliamentary Monarchy in the Constitution, Morocco is classified as “partially free” (37/100) by Freedom House (2023), a hybrid regime by the EIU Democracy Index (2021), and a closed autocracy by V-Dem (2023).

<sup>3</sup>The work of Hill (2016) demonstrated that such a model could be applied to study the democratisation of Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Mauritania).

exert pressure on regimes (through political conditionality, sanctions, diplomatic pressure, etc.) and the regimes' ability to resist outside influence. Three main factors determine the level of leverage: (i) the target state's size and military and economic strength, (ii) the presence of competing issues on the Western foreign policy agenda, and (iii) the presence of an alternative regional power that can support the country. Linkage refers to the density of a country's ties to external actors and constitutes a structural variable, shaped by geography, historical factors (e.g., colonialism) and geostrategic alliances. Although these factors are divided into six main categories (Table 3.1), they usually have a cluster effect (Hill, 2016). The main role of linkages is to channel influence by affecting the motivations of decision-makers. Most importantly, linkages increase the effectiveness of leverage (Levitsky & Way, 2005).

Tolstrup's (2013, 2014) contribution is particularly relevant here. His model combines the macro-logic of structural determinants (leverage and linkages) with the micro-logic of domestic actors' agency (gatekeeper elites). According to him, gatekeeper elites are not just the objects of external influence, but can develop and manoeuvre linkages, being "at least as important as geography, history, and culture – they can both condition the relationship given by structural factors and create linkages independently of structural preconditions". In other words, they can facilitate or constrain ties to external actors "based on their main values and/or strategic calculation of both the internal and external costs and benefits of political change" (Tolstrup, 2013, p. 717).

Tolstrup identifies three main types of gatekeeper elites: ruling elites (the core group that is in day-to-day control of the state), opposition elites (leaders of political parties, movements, or NGOs that seek to replace the incumbent regime), and economic elites (leaders of heavyweight business corporations) (Tolstrup, 2014, p. 127). Although the density of linkages could, in principle, be influenced by any gatekeeper elites, he considers that ruling elites – e.g., presidents, prime ministers, and high officials – usually have more power to do so. In sum, in Tolstrup's model, the structure (leverage and linkage) and actors (gatekeeper elites) continuously interact in iterative sequences (see Fig. 3.1).

### 3.2.2 *The External Dimension of Autocratic Resilience*

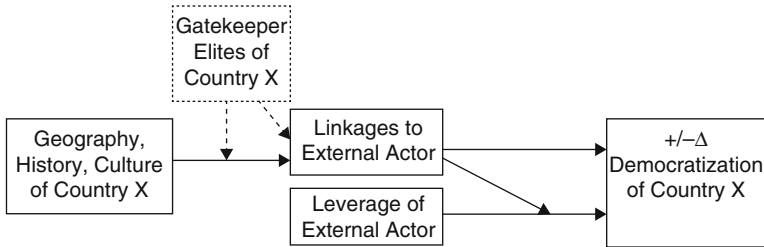
The work of Tolstrup (2009, 2014) puts forward the idea that target states are not passive actors in the "democratisation political game", mainly because "the push [for democracy] is counterbalanced and resisted with every means possible by autocrats, who wish to remain in power" (Tolstrup, 2009, p. 925). This highlights the importance of looking inside-out, paying closer attention to the intra-state dimension and how domestic actors might act and react to external variables (Pace et al., 2009).

The literature on autocratic resilience explains how authoritarian regimes tend to fight to remain in power in an environment with increased pressure for democratic reform (Heydemann, 2007; Schlumberger, 2007; Ambrosio, 2009). The most important variable within this dimension is the regime's organizational power (Levitsky &

**Table 3.1** Theoretical framework: summary of main concepts, variables, and elements

|                       | Concepts-variables                              | Definition  | Elements  |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|
| Inter-state dimension | <i>Migration diplomacy</i>                      | The strategic use of migration flows to obtain other aims, or the use of diplomatic methods to achieve goals related to migration. Two types: coercive and cooperative. | Position of countries within the web of migration chain: (1) Country of origin (2) Country of transit (3) Country of reception  |
|                       | <i>Leverage of external actor</i>               | Amount of pressure the external actor can put on a regime and the regime's ability to withstand outside influence.  | Factors determining external actor's leverage: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strength of regimes' economy and state structures</li> <li>2. The existence of competing issues on the external actors' foreign policy agenda</li> <li>3. The existence of alternative regional power that can support the country politically, economically, and militarily (power patron or Black Knight)</li> </ol>   |
|                       | <i>Linkages to an external actor</i>            | The density of a country's ties to Western countries and regional organizations such as the EU.   | Types of linkages: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Economic: trade flows, credit, and investment</li> <li>2. Intergovernmental: bilateral and diplomatic ties. Participation in alliances and international organizations</li> <li>3. Technocratic: share of elites educated abroad and/or has professional ties to foreign universities etc.</li> <li>4. Social: tourism, migration, and diaspora networks.</li> <li>5. Information: cross-border telecommunication, Internet connections, and foreign media penetration.</li> <li>6. Civil society: ties to international NGOs, religious and party organizations etc.</li> </ol> |
| Intra-state dimension | <i>Gatekeeper elites of the target state</i>    | Domestic actors hold the key to turning the volume of external actors' pressure up and down.  | Types of gatekeeper elites: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ruling elites (the core group in day-to-day control of the state).</li> <li>2. Opposition elites (leaders of political parties, movements, or NGOs that want to replace the incumbent regime).</li> <li>3. Economic elites (leaders of heavy-weight business corporations).</li> </ol>  |
|                       | <i>Organisational power of the target state</i> | Regime's ability to sustain itself.   | Three dimensions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coercive state capacity: effectiveness and experience of the security forces.</li> <li>2. Ruling party strength: cohesion, reach and mobilisation capacity of the ruling party.</li> <li>3. Control of the economy: the amount of influence a regime has over vital sectors of the economy and sources of finance</li> </ol>  |

Source: Author's own elaboration



**Fig. 3.1** Model of how external actors can influence democratisation. (Source: Retrieved from Tolstrup, 2013)

Way, 2010). This variable is determined by three capabilities of unequal importance (from highest to lowest): coercive state capacity, ruling-party strength, and control of the economy. Both coercive state capacity and party strength are determined by two criteria: scope and cohesion. The scope of a security apparatus or party is determined by its breadth and depth. Cohesion is determined by the strength of purpose and degree of unity exhibited by a security apparatus or party. Discretionary control of the economy is determined by the amount of influence a regime has over vital sectors of the economy and sources of finance.

Within this variable, the *coercive state capacity* is one of the most important features of authoritarian resilience. It refers to the effectiveness and experience of the security forces (e.g. the military, police, gendarmerie, and intelligence agencies) (Levitsky & Way, 2010). In general, effective coercion would depend on funding, equipment, and training as well as robust chains of command. Moreover, a regime's high capacity is evident when it has a "large, well-trained, and well-equipped internal security apparatus with an effective presence across the national territory". This implies that the better able a regime is to physically defend itself the better its stability and chances of survival.

The literature considers that international factors may influence the variables of autocratic resilience both directly and indirectly (Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010; Tolstrup, 2009). A direct effect would involve influencing the country's electoral regime and the elite's effective power to rule. Conversely, different kinds of sanctions and foreign policy instruments might indirectly influence the regime, including its coercive state capacity. Finally, it is important to acknowledge not only how external elements might work in favour of autocratic resilience but mainly "how authoritarian MENA regimes and opposition actors induce external actors, and specifically the EU, to perceive and react to their respective situation" (Pace et al., 2009, p. 8). In other words, how domestic actors might resort to the international sphere to improve and keep their position in the internal political game.

### 3.2.3 *The Politics of International Migration*

Several years after Greenhill's (2010) seminal study on the use of displaced people as an instrument of foreign policy, Adamson and Tsourapas (2019) coined the concept of *migration diplomacy* to explain how cross-border population mobility affects the conduct of states' diplomacy. This term refers to "the use of diplomatic tools, processes and procedures to manage cross-border population mobility, including both the strategic use of migration flows as a means to obtain other aims, and the use of diplomatic methods to achieve goals related to migration" (Ibid, 2019, p. 17). The EU's endeavour to "externalize" migration control towards third countries would provide several examples of migration diplomacy (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019).

Similar to traditional diplomacy, migration diplomacy is shaped by the interests and existing power relationships between states (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019). However, instead of looking at economic and military indicators, the position of the country in the migration system (as countries of destination, origin, or transit) determines their interests and power. Furthermore, migration diplomacy relies heavily on a process known as issue-linkage (ibid), which is the simultaneous negotiation of two or more issues with the aim of reaching a joint settlement (Tsourapas, 2017). This entails using migration as a tool to pursue other goals, such as security, economic, or diplomatic ones.

Countries in the Global South have the potential to use migration diplomacy similarly to more powerful states in the Global North. This could take two forms: coercive and cooperative (Greenhill, 2010). The first entails mobilising the "threat of migration" through promoting or facilitating irregular movements. The second involves playing the "efficiency card" (Cassarino & Del Sarto, 2018) by showing compliance and repressing migratory flows. In both cases, countries of origin and transit would be capable of applying a "reverse conditionality" to gain leverage and obtain concessions from the "host state", which could involve moral, political, economic, and/or material support) (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019; Zardo & Cavatorta, 2018).

## 3.3 How "Externalisation" Meets Democratisation: The Arguments

The framework presented in this chapter outlines two arguments connected to the proposed dimensions. The first highlights the relevance of migration as a central *linkage* within Euro-Med relations, capable of shaping the motivations, strategic calculations, and *leverage* of actors involved. Furthermore, the potential effects of migration are amplified when combined with other economic and intergovernmental linkages through *issue-linkage*. It not only shapes the EU's ability to apply pressure upon SMCs, but can also influence the target regime's ability to withstand external influence. Several authors assert that this shift of power from the core towards the

periphery is expected in certain areas of cooperation, and recently, migration has become one of them (Dimitrovova, 2010; Völkel, 2020; Pace et al., 2009). Therefore, migration diplomacy might represent a significant source of power for *gate-keeper elites* in SMCs.

This last idea is linked to the second argument, which emphasizes that the “externalisation” of EU migration policies can impact the *regime’s organizational power*, influencing power dynamics and altering incentive structures for domestic actors in SMCs. While some authors acknowledge the empowerment of neighbouring countries through migration diplomacy (Cassarino, 2005, 2012; Demmelhuber, 2011; Wunderlich, 2010; El Qadim, 2010; Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2016), scant attention have been devoted to the implications for their internal politics and democratic development (Akkerman, 2018; Prestianni, 2018; Koch et al., 2018; Andersson & Keen, 2019; Völkel, 2020). This oversight stems from viewing targeted states as black boxes, disregarding the diverse aims of different actors within them. Actors negotiating with the EU on migration control often belong to ruling elites and may not always represent the interests of the entire country (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2017). Hence, I argue for the significance of examining the internal dynamics of SMCs and determine which actors are empowered or disempowered by this process, as well as the potential for migration policies to be utilized as a tool for autocratic resilience.

### **3.4 How “Externalisation” Meets Democratisation: The Case of Morocco**

The research involved applying the suggested theoretical lens to the case of Morocco and analysing the relevance of the presented arguments in this context. All data was coded and analysed using Nvivo software, following a deductive strategy based on the identified variables, concepts, and elements summarized in Table 3.1. The analysis is structured to reflect the dual nature of the theoretical framework, distinguishing between international/inter-state and domestic/intra-state dimensions.

The analysis relied on desk research and a diverse range of qualitative data. One of the primary sources of information was policy documents related to the EU-Morocco cooperation framework, including the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF). Specifically, I examined ENP funding documents, progress reports, as well as action documents for the 12 projects implemented in Morocco under the EUTF (refer to Table 3.3 in the Annex), along with available monitoring reports. Additionally, I consulted informative documents from the EU, civil society reports, newspaper articles, and empirical literature. The analysis centered on the five-year period following the “migration crisis” (2015–2020) due to the significance of political events during this timeframe, particularly in terms of democratisation and migration, offering an opportunity for a comprehensive analysis.

### ***3.4.1 (Inter-State Dimension) Migration as High Linkage: Hampering the External Actor Leverage While Empowering the Target Regime***

#### **Hampering the External Actor Leverage: EU Foreign Policy Goals at Odds**

The literature widely agrees that historically, the EU has adopted a position towards Morocco that favours “limited democracy” over no democracy at all, with little inclination to exert significant pressure for democratisation (Kausch, 2009; Khahee, 2010). This stance can largely be attributed to the EU’s interests and priorities in the field of migration. Morocco has long been a key partner in various EU initiatives related to migration control. Scholars have argued that the EU’s reliance on Morocco and the imperative to ensure effective implementation of migration policies have led to a prioritization of maintaining the status quo in the country (Hill, 2016). Despite substantial linkages in other areas and existing power asymmetries, the EU’s capacity, and willingness to influence Morocco’s democratisation are perceived to be diminished due to the conflicting nature of this issue and the goal of controlling migration (Cassarino, 2012; Noutcheva, 2015; Bauer, 2015).

In general, EU policies in the field of democratic assistance vis-à-vis this country have been deemed either unsuccessful or counterproductive (Van Hüllen, 2012; Khahee, 2017). Similarly, when it comes to promoting democracy through migration policies, the story does not seem very different. Despite the EU’s rhetoric focused on tackling the root-causes of migration, its primary emphasis has been towards employing a remote-control approach. This approach is characterized by short-term measures aimed at curbing migration and securitizing the Moroccan border (Carrera et al., 2015; den Hertog, 2016). This argument can be further supported by analysing the projects implemented under the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF).

Among the seven projects implemented specifically in Morocco, only one (EUTFM04 – Regional migration policy) falls under the broader objective of “improved governance and conflict prevention”. This objective aims to support enhancements in overall good governance by promoting conflict prevention, addressing human rights abuses, and upholding the rule of law.<sup>4</sup> The remaining six projects align with the theme of “improved migration management,” with the primary objective of developing national strategies for managing migration, enhancing capacities to prevent irregular migration, and combating human trafficking.<sup>5</sup> Within the regional context, all five projects are solely dedicated to the theme of “improved management of migration.”

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/thematic/improved-migration-management>

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/thematic/improved-migration-management>



Additionally, the combined budget allocated to the six EUTF projects<sup>6</sup> focused on migrant integration and enhancing their overall situation amounts to €27.6 million. This amount appears significantly smaller when compared to the €184.9 million dedicated to migration management and border control. These budget distributions suggest that the bulk of the EUTF funds allocated to Morocco have been primarily directed towards enhancing the capacity of the Moroccan state and its border control entities to dissuade migration flows towards Europe, particularly in terms of resources, training, and personnel. Typically, the main recipients of these funds are the Ministry of Interior and the security forces.

Another indication of the EU's reduced leverage over Morocco is the fact that, in addition to refraining from exerting significant pressure, the EU seems to be rewarding the country for its cooperation on migration and democratisation matters. Despite the lack of democratic progress, Morocco remains the primary EU partner. For instance, within the ENP framework, Morocco would not qualify for positive conditionality (the "more for more" approach) (Catalano & Graziano, 2016). Nonetheless, the country has become a privileged partner and the largest recipient of EU funds, particularly after the "Arab Uprisings", regardless of its limited progress in implementing reforms (ibid).

In several policy documents (See EUTFM07) the EU praises Morocco for its advancements in terms of democratisation, which seems to be in line with its "applause policy" (Hill, 2016; Catalano & Graziano, 2016). Disregarding evidence provided by the literature, experts, and reports, the EU fails to acknowledge Morocco's backsliding in terms of human rights and basic freedoms (Catalano & Graziano, 2016; Andersson & Keen, 2019; Uzelac, 2020), the consecutive downward trend arrows in its democratic status since 2017 (see Freedom House scores<sup>7</sup>), or the lack of improvement in the Western Sahara dossier. Furthermore, the EU avoids engaging with opposition groups or intervening in contentious issues, as demonstrated by its silence regarding the recent protests sparked by the "Hirak al Rif" movement and the regime's harsh crackdown on protesters, journalists, and activists (Ben Jellou, 2018).

### **Empowering the Target Regime: Migration as Bargain Coin for Morocco**

As outlined earlier, linkages between actors are not solely determined by structural factors but can also be manipulated by *gatekeeper elites* (Tolstrup, 2013). Authors provided evidence of how Moroccan gatekeepers, particularly the ruling elite, capitalized on their increased bargaining power derived from migration linkages to withstand outside influence and exert an inverted leverage over the EU (Cassarino,

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<sup>6</sup>EUTFM01 – Live together without discrimination, EUTFM02 – Juridical empowerment, EUTFM03 – Vulnerable migrants, EUTFM04 – Regional migration policy, EUTFM08 – Regional development, EUTFM09 – monitoring and evaluation.

<sup>7</sup>Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/morocco/freedom-world/2017>

2005; El Qadim, 2010, 2015; Wunderlich, 2010; Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2016; Werenfels, 2018). In essence, these studies suggest that ruling elites in Morocco have been empowered by the “border security gaming”. The analysis offers several examples of how this empowerment is unfolding.

To assert its demands with the EU, Morocco has employed a combination of two *migration diplomacy* approaches: (i) a cooperative approach, positioning itself as a “good student” and emphasizing its efficiency in addressing migration issues (Cassarino, 2005); (ii) a coercive approach, leveraging threats to ease migration controls or halt migration cooperation (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2016). In both cases, Morocco heavily relies on issue-linkage as a strategic tool, often described as a master in “packaging” its interests (Werenfels, 2018), which pursue political, economic, and material goals.

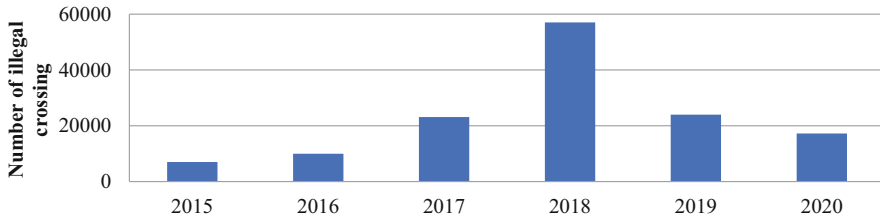
When engaging in cooperative migration diplomacy, Morocco underlines its efforts and ability to manage migration and conducting border surveillance, as well as its willingness to readmit migrants (Wolff, 2008). This strategy is evident in various interviews given by Khalid Zerouali, the director of the Directorate of Migration and Border Surveillance (DMBS), in 2018 and 2019. During these interviews, Zerouali highlighted the work carried out by Morocco in “securing” the EU, emphasizing their effectiveness in preventing irregular migrations and dismantling criminal networks (Telquel, 2018; El Diario, 2019). While he underscores Morocco’s proactive stance in this domain, he also acknowledges that the country has already mobilized all available resources and would require budgetary support to sustain the functioning of the implemented mechanisms (Telquel, 2018). This support would entail a cost of over €200 million per year for Rabat (El Diario, 2019).

Even though Morocco relies largely on cooperative migration diplomacy, it does not refrain from using coercive strategies to achieve its goals. The episodes surrounding the Western Sahara crisis that traversed EU-Morocco relations during 2016–2019 provides a clear example of that. This crisis was triggered by a series of decisions from the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in 2015–2016, ruling that the Western Sahara fell outside the scope of Morocco’s Association Agreement (Lovatt, 2020).<sup>8</sup> Morocco perceived this ruling as an assault on its sovereignty and territorial integrity, prompting it to engage in issue-linkage strategies and inverse conditionality by issuing threats to the EU regarding their cooperation on migration control. Some observers argue that the successful storming of the border walls in Ceuta in February 2017 as being related with these episodes<sup>9</sup> (Fernández-Molina, 2017; Werenfels, 2018). In fact, these events have been surrounded by the progressive increase of irregular migration from Morocco (See Graphic 3.1).

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<sup>8</sup>See Fernández-Molina, 2017 and GADDEM, 2018 for a detailed account.

<sup>9</sup>Although gatekeeper elites cannot directly create migration flows, they can still change the flows, or at least manipulate EU perceptions over them. According to Zardo and Cavatorta (2018) “the bigger the perception of volatility”, the bigger the leverage of neighbouring authoritarian countries, regardless of the migration threat being real or not.



Source: Own elaboration with data from the FRONTEX website.

**Graphic 3.1** Illegal border crossings on the Western route (sea and land) in numbers

The final decision by the CJEU was made in February 2018, ruling that the fisheries agreements would remain valid as long as it did not apply to the Western Sahara. The decision was considered as fairly satisfying by the Moroccan government and marked the beginning of a new era of EU-Morocco relations and the resumption of political and financial exchanges, mainly in the field of migration. The outcomes have also been advantageous for the EU as it witnessed a decrease in the number of arrivals from Morocco already in 2019 (See Graphic 3.1), indicating that both the agreements and measures implemented by Rabat were proving effective.

In conclusion, both cooperative and coercive migration diplomacy strategies have contributed to the empowerment of Moroccan ruling elites. This is evident in the approval of the two largest EUTF projects, with budgets of €44 million and €101.7 million respectively, which occurred after the episodes mentioned above. Additionally, the EU has allocated an estimated budget of €3.5 billion for Moroccan authorities for the period of 2020–2027. These substantial figures indicate that the EU is heavily invested in maintaining Morocco as a close and longstanding partner.

### 3.4.2 (*Intra-State Dimension*) “*Border Security Gaming*”: *A Tool for Autocratic Resilience?*

#### **Boosting the regime’s Organizational Power**

While King Mohamed VI and the ruling elites (the *Makhzen*) hold a central gatekeeper position within the Moroccan political sphere (Wunderlich, 2010; Feliu & Parejo, 2012; Hill, 2016), they play a pivotal role in the negotiation and implementation of EU external migration policies in the country. In addition to the King himself, the Ministry of Interior and its security bodies<sup>10</sup> are the central actors in EU

<sup>10</sup>The Directorate of National Security (DNS), responsible for the Moroccan National Police that control authorized crossing points with the support of the Auxiliary Forces and the Directorate of Migration and Border Surveillance (DMBS), “responsible for the operational implementation of the national strategy to combat human trafficking networks and border surveillance” (Elmadmad, 2007, p. 39).

migration policies (Ibid). Consequently, the domestic actors that are being empowered by the process of “externalisation” are mainly those less inclined to facilitate regime change in this country. They are more likely to use such advantageous position to enhance autocratic resilience, thereby prompting regime stability and survival. At least three types of concessions obtained by Morocco through the “border security gaming” would have the potential to stabilise and reinforce (even indirectly) the *regime organisational power* in its three dimensions (party strength, control of the economy and coercive state capacity): (i) political/moral, (ii) economic and (iii) material/logistical.

(i) Political/moral concessions: increasing ruling elites’ legitimacy

Two crucial themes for Morocco’s legitimacy are its international image and its authority over the Western Sahara (Hill, 2016; Fernández-Molina, 2017; Werenfels, 2018). Morocco’s competitive authoritarianism is highly concerned with international opinion and with maintaining good relations with the West (Hill, 2016, p. 168). The issue of maintaining control over the Western Sahara is contentious due to its territorial and resource significance. Additionally, the counterinsurgency campaign against the Polisario in the 1970s has shaped the security forces’ imaginaries and is broadly responsible for the non-materials ties that maintain its high cohesion (Hill, 2016, p. 157).

The previous section already provided several examples of how the EU has been granting political recognition to the Moroccan regime. This recognition takes the form of praising the regime for its democratising efforts in policy documents, when evidence shows otherwise, or by refraining from criticizing human rights and democratic backsliding in the country – despite reports from NGOs and democracy indexes insisting on their severity. To underscore this point further, two additional examples of this sort of legitimacy concessions should be highlighted.

The first example involves the granting of Advanced Status for Morocco in 2008. As the first and only Arabic country to receive such status<sup>11</sup> this has been considered as a “gift from heaven” for its capacity of boosting the regime’s international reputation. Moreover, it would enable a closer association with the EU, which means more aid and economic benefits for the country (Kausch, 2009). While not at the same scale, the second example indicates a comparable phenomenon, as certain European countries (in concrete Germany and Belgium) are considering designating Morocco a “safe third country”. This designation implies that asylum seekers could be quickly and safely returned to Morocco (Concord, 2018). Euromed Rights (2018) has been closely monitoring this topic, contending that giving these countries such “safe” status “means that no risk of persecution exists in principle for nationals of that country or foreign nationals, and that their human rights are effectively respected, including the right of asylum”.

In what concerns the autonomy of Western Sahara, Morocco seems to have succeeded until now in maintaining its stance on it. Despite numerous unfavourable

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<sup>11</sup> Now being also negotiated with Tunisia.

rulings by the CJEU the EU has broadly remained apart from this contentious “internal affair”. According to Lovatt (2020): “Yet while the EU does not recognise Moroccan sovereignty over the area, it has not adopted the UN’s characterisation of it as an occupied territory. Instead, the EU has labelled Western Sahara as a “non-self-governing territory” ‘de facto’ administered by the Kingdom of Morocco – conjuring up a legal concept that does not exist in international law”.

In sum, Morocco seems to have succeeded in silencing the EU on human rights, democracy, and self-determination – all of which could potentially contribute to sustaining and even boosting the power of the ruling elites both internally and externally.

(ii) Economic concessions: sustaining ruling elites’ modernisation agenda

When considering economic concessions, these primarily take the form of monetary aid, either directly related to migration funds (EUTF) or other type of financial instrument/incentives (European Neighbourhood Instrument – ENI). As in the case of political concessions, economic provisions could also have the effect of enhancing ruling elites’ power, legitimacy, and control over the economy.

An example of this could be seen in the recent announcement by the EU of a new financial package to Morocco, totalling €389 million. Out of this total, €289 million are destined for bolstering Moroccan reforms and inclusive development, while €101.7 million are allocated as direct budget support for border management (European Commission, 2019). Furthermore, for the period 2014–2017 the ENI had an indicative budget of €728–890 million for Morocco only, which includes funds for migration control and other projects (EEAS/European Commission, 2014). Morocco has also been a beneficiary of the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF), which has financed ten projects thus far, totalling €203.8 million, including the construction of the largest solar power station in Africa (EU Factography – Morocco, 2016).

These resources would serve as an important tool for the Moroccan regime. Since ascending to the throne, Mohamed VI, has engaged in a series of economic and political reforms to align with his narrative of propelling the country into a “New Era” (Darif, 2012). By investing in modernisation and economic liberalisation, the monarchy created a new source of legitimacy based on political and economic effectiveness (*ibid*). According to Bogaert (2018, p. 9): “whereas Hassan II ruled with an iron hand, Mohamed VI rules via holdings, funds and new state agencies”. This underscores the regime needs for resources to maintain its image of modernising country as a key source of internal power and legitimacy.

Another related concern is that a significant portion of the funds supposedly allocated to support the country’s development and address deep structural problems have been expended in large-scale projects, such as the solar power station and improving the country physical infra-structure (Khakee, 2017), including Moroccan highways (Hatim, 2020). As expected, these investments have not resulted in improvements in the country’s Human Development Index, which remains the lowest among Arab countries. This index hinges on other issues such as schooling and life expectancy, matters not addressed by this sort of economic investment/

reform. Moreover, given that the *Makhzen* is widely perceived as benefiting economically from its closeness to the palace (Ibid) this also raises suspicion of corruption and misuse of funds. Likewise, the unconditioned nature and lack of transparency of certain financial aids, such as the EUTFM07 Budget support, could translate into a blank check for the government, potentially fostering more corruption (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012).

(iii) Material/logistical concessions: strengthening the coercive state capacity

Apart from economic concessions, the “externalisation” of EU migration policies implies the provision of substantial material, logistic and capacity building support to Morocco, primarily target at its state and security apparatus. Existing literature has already raised particular concern with the effects of this type of support in strengthening the *coercive state capacity* of authoritarian regimes (Demmelhuber, 2011; Baird, 2016; Koch et al., 2018; Akkerman, 2018; Andersson & Keen, 2019; Völkel, 2020). As explained in the theoretical framework, this dimension is paramount for autocratic resilience. In the case of Morocco, the regime’s high organizational power relies largely on this dimension (Hill, 2016), and particularly on the strength of the regime security forces (Dorado-Nogueras, 2011).

The analysis of some EUTF projects provides several examples of the kind of material the EU is financing. For instance, the EUTFM08–Regional development (€30 million) plans the provision of IT infrastructure for collecting, archiving, and identifying digital biometrics, acquisition of vehicles as well as surveillance, intervention and communication equipment for the different field units, and the necessary equipment for aerial surveillance. Similarly, the EUTFM07–Budget support (€101.7 million) aims to enhance the management of land and sea borders, and airports. Lastly, the project EUTFM05–Integrated border management (€44 million) also refers to the same sort of investment, which include the already approved acquisition of 384 vehicles on the value of €26 million (See Table 3.4 in the Annex).

The acquisition of these materials and capacities alone does not necessarily indicate a strengthening of the country’s coercive state capacity. However, in the case of Morocco, such enhancement could potentially be leveraged as a tool for autocratic resilience. On the one hand, there is a concern that such enhancement may come at the expense of migrants’ rights. Numerous reports from NGOs have documented increased violence against migrants, mass arrests and forced displacements in Northern Morocco, coinciding with the considerable transference of funds and equipment from the EU (AMDH, 2017, 2019; GADEM, 2018; Prestianni, 2018). On the other hand, there is a risk of funds and equipment being misappropriated by the regime to repress and control its citizens (Koch et al., 2018). This is particularly worrisome because the security forces financed by the EU to control migration in Morocco are the same forces responsible for the regime’s coercive state capacity. According to Levitsky and Way (2010), effective coercion heavily relies on funding, equipment, and training. Since the EU is providing precisely this kind of support through its migration policies, the possibility of dual use of these resources should be considered. However, only one project (EUTFM12–Dismantling criminal networks) mentions this particular risk.

In contrast, scholars and NGOs have expressed concerns about this possibility, citing the lack of transparency and accountability related with the funds allocated (Wunderlich, 2010; AMDH, 2017; Uzelac, 2020) and the ethical challenge associated with the export of border management technologies, such as biometric control (Wolff, 2008). Given that Moroccan coercive power largely relies on low intensity-operations (Hill, 2016), which involve harassment, intimidation and persecution of the regime's opponents and critics (See Human Rights Watch, 2022), it could be argued that this sort of money and technology transference could significantly contribute to these operations.

### **Opposition Elites' Disempowerment**

Finally, it is worth mentioning that by prioritizing state ruling elites as the main actors for cooperation and negotiation in Morocco, the EU may inadvertently sideline opposition elites, mainly civil society actors. This raises two significant concerns. Firstly, this could result in less engagement and fewer resources for the most reform-minded actors within Moroccan society. Secondly, this lack of support and disregard places these actors in a difficult position for challenging and criticizing the regime's abusive behaviour, mainly in the field of migration (Baird, 2016). Therefore, in addition to potentially increasing the power of ruling elites through political, economic, and material means, EU cooperation on migration may also diminish the relative power of opposition elites. Many authors argue that this trend is unlikely to change, as even after the "Arab Uprisings", the EU continues to view ruling elites as the primary interlocutors of migration control cooperation (Demmelhuber, 2011; Dandashly, 2018; Zardo & Cavatorta, 2018). This is further evidenced by the minimal relevance given to civil society organizations in the twelve EUTF projects for Morocco analysed here.

## **3.5 Conclusion**

The main objective of this chapter was to examine the influence of EU external migration policies on the democratisation of SMCs, with a specific focus on analysing policy practices. By introducing an innovative theoretical framework and applying it to the case of Morocco, this study has provided both theoretical and empirical insights into the complex interplay between these processes. While conducting empirical research on authoritarian regimes poses challenges, the analysis of the Moroccan case suggests that EU "externalisation" of migration control may have a negative impact on the country's democratic development, potentially reinforcing or stabilizing autocratic structures. The key findings of the analysis, which are summarized in Table 3.2, highlight these dynamics.

It can be argued that such an outcome would contradict the EU's own narratives and policies regarding democracy promotion, as well as its self-proclaimed image as a regional normative power. The case study presented suggests a wide and deep gap

**Table 3.2** How “externalisation” meets democratisation in Morocco: summary of findings

| Theoretical framework |   | The case of Morocco                                 |   |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|
|                       | Argument  | Concepts-variables                                  | Main research findings  |
| Inter-state dimension | Migration, as a matter of high politics and a significant international and security issue, is likely to be a linkage of extreme relevance for Euro-Med relations, capable of changing motivations and strategic calculations of actors at both shores of the Mediterranean and influencing their leverage over each other. | <i>Migration diplomacy</i>                          | Both the external actor (EU) and the target regime (Morocco) seem to use migration diplomacy and issue-linkage strategies based on their interests and values. The EU avoid pressuring Morocco to democratize, opting for a stabilisation strategy and a reward policy, to fulfil its (short-term) migration goals. Moroccan ruling elites have been instrumentalizing migration to exploit the EU’s interests and priorities (applying cooperative and coercive diplomacy) as a (long-term) strategy to credit and stabilize the regime. |
|                       |   | <i>Leverage of external actor</i>                   | The development of EU external migration policies might have been hampering the EU’s capacity and willingness of promoting democracy in Morocco mainly due to competing issues in the EU foreign policy agenda.   |
|                       |   | <i>Linkage to an external actor</i>                 | The migration linkage between the EU and Morocco might influence the external actor’s leverage and might be used by gatekeeper ruling elites in target states to endure outside influence and exert inverted leverage, making the policy process responsive to their needs. Ultimately, it indicates how migration is a linkage of great importance for EU-Morocco relations.   |
| Intra-state dimension | The “externalisation” of EU migration policies might impact the regime’s organizational power, influencing gatekeeper elites’ power positions and modifying the incentive structures of the domestic actors in SMCs, being potentially an important tool for autocratic resilience.   | <i>Gatekeeper elites of target states</i>           | The “border security gaming” is empowering Moroccan ruling elites (the Makhzen), who are likely to use the advantaged position provided by high linkage on migration as a tool for autocratic resilience. At the same time, the EU’s preference for ruling elites might have the potential effect of disempowering opposition elites.   |
|                       |   | <i>The organizational power of the target state</i> | At least three types of concessions derived from the “border security gaming” might contribute to the stabilization and reinforcement of the regime’s organizational power: (i) political/moral (ii) economic and (iii) material/logistical. The first two would reinforce the regime’s internal and external political legitimacy and control over the economy. The last one would mainly reinforce the regime’s coercive state capacity.  |

Source: Author’s own elaboration



between EU discourses, policy implementation, and their consequences. This gap is wide due to the complete contradiction between policy narratives and practices. Its depth is related to the fact that by strengthening autocratic forces in SMCs, the EU may inadvertently reinforce the very drivers of migration that its policies aim to address, such as the lack of democracy, good governance, and human rights (Andersson & Keen, 2019; Prestianni, 2018). In other words, EU policies would not only fail to address the underlying structural causes of migration but could potentially exacerbate them, thereby risking worsening the migration challenge in the long term (Abderrahim, 2018). Additionally, this would contribute to “process of disillusionment” with the Barcelona Process (Zapata-Barrero, 2020), which, after twenty-five years, has not fulfilled its goal of strengthening democracy and mobility across the Mediterranean region.

## Annex

**Table 3.3** Complete list of EUTF projects in Morocco (2015–)

| Title   | CODE   | EUTF contribution | Implementer | Theme                         | Adoption date |
|---|--|-------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Vivre ensemble sans discrimination: une approche basée sur les Droits de l’Homme et la dimension de genre | EUTFM01 – Live together without discrimination | 5500000.00        | AECID       | Improved migration management | 16/12/2016    |
| Empowerment juridique des personnes migrantes   | EUTFM02 – Juridical empowerment                | 4580000.00        | ENABEL      | Improved migration management | 04/12/2017    |
| Assistance aux personnes migrantes en situation de vulnérabilité  | EUTFM03 – Vulnerable migrants                  | 6500000.00        | NGOs        | Improved migration management | 06/07/2018    |
| Déploiement des Politiques Migratoires au Niveau Régional   | EUTFM04 – Regional migration policy            | 8000000.00        | ENABEL      | Improved migration management | 13/12/2018    |
| Soutien à la gestion intégrée des frontières et de la migration au Maroc                                  | EUTFM05 – Integrated border management         | 44000000.00       | FILAPP      | Improved migration management | 13/12/2018    |

(continued)

**Table 3.3** (continued)

| Title  | CODE                                  | EUTF contribution                         | Implementer  | Theme   | Adoption date |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|---------------|
| Coopération Sud-Sud en matière de migration  | EUTFM06 – South-South cooperation     | 8613500.00                                | GIZ  | Improved migration management   | 23/05/2017    |
| Appui aux actions des autorités marocaines contre les réseaux facilitant les flux migratoires irréguliers          | EUTFM07 – Budget support              | 101750000.00                              | Kingdom of Morocco                                   | Improved migration management   | 10/12/2019    |
| TOTAL: 178.943.500,00 €  |                                       |   |  |   |               |
| Regional projects (North African Window)   |                                       |   |  |   |               |
| Regional Development and Protection Programme in the North of Africa   |                                       | 9900000.00 (20% to Morocco – 1,980,000)   | Save the children, IOM, MSF                          | Improved migration management   | 16/06/2016    |
| Formulation of programmes, Implementation of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, and communication activities | EUTFM09 – Monitoring and evaluation   | 5200000.00 (20% to Morocco – 1,040,000)   | ICPMD  | Improved migration management   | 23/05/2017    |
| Border Management Programme for the Maghreb region (BMP-Maghreb)   | EUTFM10 – BMP Maghreb                 | 55000000.00 (50% to Morocco – 27,500,000) | ICMPD together with the Italian Ministry of Interior | Improved migration management, improved governance, and conflict prevention | 06/07/2018    |
| Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa                     | EUTFM11 – Labour migration governance | 25,000,000 (33% to Morocco – 8,300,000)   | ILO, IOM, GIZ, ENABEL                                | Improved migration management   | 13/12/2018    |

(continued)

**Table 3.3** (continued)

| Title   | CODE                                    | EUTF contribution                       | Implementer | Theme                         | Adoption date |
|---|---|---|-------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Dismantling the criminal networks operating in North Africa and involved in migrant smuggling and human trafficking | EUTFM12 – Dismantling criminal networks | 15,000,000 (20% to Morocco – 3,000,000) | UNODC       | Improved migration management | 01/08/2019    |
| TOTAL REGIONAL PROJECTS: 41.820.000,00 €  |   |   |             |                               |               |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the available data on EUTF documents and website

**Table 3.4** Material acquired by FIIAPP for Morocco under the project EUTFM05 – Integrated border management

| #     | Type and quantity                              | Value        |
|-------|--|--------------|
| LOT 1 | 230 tropicalized 4x4 vehicles,                 | € 13,800,000 |
| LOT 2 | 10 4 × 4 vehicles with ambulance configuration | € 520,000    |
| LOT 3 | 100 4 × 4 pick up vehicles                     | € 5,500,000  |
| LOT 4 | 10 4 × 4 water tanker trucks                   | € 1,650,000  |
| LOT 5 | 8 gasoline tanker trucks                       | € 1320,000   |
| LOT 6 | 18 4 × 4 platform trucks                       | € 2,610,000  |
| LOT 7 | 8 refrigerated trucks                          | € 600,000    |
| TOTAL | 384 vehicles                                   | € 26,000,000 |

Source: Spanish Ministry Council 2019. Available at: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/consejodeministros/referencias/Paginas/2019/refc20190705.aspx>

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