



Conceptualising the Mediterranean Global South: A research agenda on security, borders and human flows¹

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Introduction

What does globalization tell us concerning the Mediterranean? How has the global transformation (Buzan, Lawson 2013) involved the Mediterranean? Where does the Mediterranean stand in debates on regional (dis)order (Attinà 2021)? Which are the main features of the Mediterranean Global South in the 21st century? Following the end of the Cold War, the Global South concept entered the International Relations (IR) scholarly debate to reflect global transformations and change (Korany 1994). Overcoming traditional cleavages such as the North-South divide and the East-West cleavage, referring to Global South marks a shift from a development or cultural focus to embrace more comprehensive geopolitical power relations. The term is now well-established in the literature and several scholars use it referring to regions outside Europe and North America, in Latin America, Asia, Africa or Oceania, without devoting much attention to definitions. This contribution, instead, seeks to (re)conceptualise the Global South adding a Mediterranean dimension, replacing obsolete concepts such as third world or under-developed poor South, focusing on a wider range of interconnected dimensions and issues, including climate change, environment, migration, (lack of) democracy/authoritarian resilience, viruses and pandemics, alongside security and development.

Rethinking security, borders and human mobility helps to conceptualize the Mediterranean Global South to explain where power resides. This study suggests moving beyond cores of power to zoom instead on peripheries to explore diffusion of power and power shifts within this complex area assumed as an intersection, a critical junction, between Global North and Global South. The Mediterranean is an area where things happen, where the European Union (EU) flounders, while the global powers, the United States, China and Russia (directly or indirectly) meet regional powers such as Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia. IR scholars apply complexity theory to address the problems of order transition (Charalampaki 2021). Ongoing conflicts and clashes, existing threats and human mobility indicate that the Mediterranean is a relevant area in this complex picture. Coordination is required,

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even (more) in times of liberal internationalism, “[c]oordination counts in international relations especially in times of turbulence, declining order, and weakening world policies” (Attinà 2021: 33). Problems on the agenda of the world political system such as climate change, maritime security, energy supply, require common action. This regional politics’ analysis provides substance to ongoing debates on world politics drawing lessons from security and human flows at the EU borders.

To contribute to this Special Issue on “The (re)configuration of the Euro-Mediterranean space after the 2011 Arab uprisings: borders, politics and identity”, the paper addresses the following key questions: What does border security mean? States’ security and migrants’ security are necessarily contradictory and mutually exclusive? To secure borders guarantees or impedes human security? And more importantly, whose security is at stake when dealing with border control?

1. Conceptualizing the Mediterranean Global South: a new analytical prism for Euro-Mediterranean Relations

During the 1990s, Mediterranean Politics scholars focused primarily on conceptualizing regional security in a multi-dimensional framework to explain the region-building processes going on in the Mediterranean. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), launched in November 1995, when the EU and 12 Mediterranean partner countries adopted the Barcelona Declaration, represented a EU-led multi-dimensional cooperation framework aiming at creating an area of peace and stability in the Mediterranean, an area of prosperity based upon a Mediterranean free trade area, a democratic and multicultural area. Within a decade the EU revised the EMP and created new cooperation platforms in the Mediterranean. In 2004 the EU launched the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), relying primarily upon the bilateral cooperation between EU and Mediterranean and Eastern Neighbours, and in 2008 it fostered intergovernmental cooperation within the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). The creation of the UfM marked the passing from a comprehensive cooperation framework to a selective neo-functional approach focusing on specific issues (Panebianco 2010).

The *Routledge Handbook on Mediterranean Politics* edited by Richard Gillespie and Frederic Volpi (2018), “especially the chapters by Bicchi, Hinnebusch, Schumacher and Youngs” explored this variety of regional cooperation processes to conceptualise the Mediterranean, and security in the Mediterranean, via several theoretical lenses, including regionalism and international practices. This paper suggests to move further and identify a new analytical prism to better understand Euro-Mediterranean relations.

‘Mediterranean’, ‘region’ and ‘security’ will be explored as a starting point to conceptualize the Mediterranean Global South. The concept ‘Mediterranean’ has been defined in overabundant literature; history and geography as well as IR, as well as history and geography, has a long tradition in the conceptualization of Mediterranean region/area/space, etc. IR scholars have often dwelled in a dichotomy vision of the Mediterranean: peace vs war, instability vs stability, conflict vs

cooperation, prosperity vs poverty, unity vs fragmentation. However, a dichotomy approach does not bring any further in the understanding of the current Mediterranean scenario. Over the years, images of bridges, or conversely of walls, have been adopted to explain the contradictions of this area. Following a Braudelian approach, scholars investigated the common features of the Mediterranean; with Samuel Huntington, instead, the concept of wall emerged as the main consequence of a 'civilization clash' (Huntington 1993). Assuming, on the one hand, the Mediterranean as the 'cradle of civilizations' following the Braudelian unitary vision that stems from a geographical explanation, and, on the other, the Huntingtonian culturalist vision of the Mediterranean as the product of a 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1993) does not help the conceptualisation of the Euro-Mediterranean space. The search for unity in the Mediterranean that has characterized regional analyses of Braudelian inspiration, seems inadequate to grasp the complexity of the Mediterranean, because the Mediterranean encompasses also several sources of regional instability. The Mediterranean is a fragmented area, characterised by richness and variety. It is not a region of peace, nor a region of conflict, it can be both. Thus, Federica Bicchi (2018) suggests to overcome a dichotomy vision of the Mediterranean because the Mediterranean lays 'between unity and fault line' in a sort of grey area in-between and '[t]he essence of the Mediterranean [...] seems to be this "in-between-ness" [...]' (Bicchi 2018: 337). Also Meier (2020) focuses on 'in-between' border spaces in the Mediterranean, specifically in the Levant.

There is no need to invest on the unicity of this area to explain the main features of the *Mare Nostrum*. In the Mediterranean, as elsewhere, new and old challenges to security require common policies and actions (Attinà 2011). The Mediterranean can be assumed as a micro-cosmos of what happens in world politics. The Mediterranean Global South experiences regional, intra-EU and intra-neighbours' tensions. Security and insecurity play a crucial role in Mediterranean Politics research and the regional impact of the Libyan or Syrian conflicts is a most prominent issue in the research agenda. However, security challenges stem from a wider Mediterranean region, with the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa also contributing to insecurity in a wider regional projection (Panebianco 2019a). Politically, not just geographically, the Mediterranean represents an overlapping area (an 'area in between') in a Global Mediterranean South that is characterised by a proliferation and sharing of security challenges. Focusing upon the challenges at the EU borders, it is more fruitful to define the Mediterranean as the 'common space' where the North-South and center-periphery cleavages meet (Ribas-Mateos 2015: 28), as a major crossroad for migratory flows, i.e. a critical junction between Global North and Global South.

It is actually the definition of region that requires to be reframed accordingly. Regional security challenges require adequate common strategies and the involvement of all relevant actors, state and non-state ones. It has to be assessed where power resides, which are the most powerful actors addressing challenges at the borders, considering that borders are permeable and can expand according to the issues at stake well beyond the Global North to include the Global South, in what

we call the Mediterranean Global South. There are relevant actors and processes that require a common approach to be effective in addressing regional issues such as migration. An issue-oriented framework provides a more fruitful understanding of the Mediterranean than regionalism, even in its neo-version. Regionalism does not imply a single model, it can follow different paths and degrees (Barbé and Herranz-Surrallés 2010) or feature as a case of 'open regionalism' (Joffé 2007). In the Mediterranean, it easily turns into 'volatile' regionalism (Panebianco, 2010). Yet, to understand security in the Mediterranean Global South, an issue-based theoretical framework appears more fruitful.

Considering Bicchi's notice that 'the expression "the Mediterranean" seems to be currently going out of fashion, in favour of mentions of Europe and the Middle East' (Bicchi 2018: 329), new concepts and theoretical frameworks have to be explored so to avoid that this expression disappears from the academic discourse. To recast the Mediterranean in the academic map and understand security in the Mediterranean in this age of crisis, this paper conceives the Mediterranean Global South as a critical junction between Global North and Global South, an epicentre of flows crucial to the EU, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. A wider Mediterranean region emerges from regional cooperation initiatives to address security issues that proliferate across blurred borders because of political fragility, extreme poverty and climate change characterizing the Southern Mediterranean. Irregular migration in the wider Mediterranean is a case in point, a meaningful example of borders' shifting leading to a redefinition of strategies to address border issues.

The academic debate on fuzzy borders is well established. The traditional concept of frontier implying a geographical notion incorporating administrative and political functions, thus reflecting a Weberian concept of state, does not capture the complex reality of current times. Focusing on the EU's relations with its periphery, Raffaella Del Sarto talks about the EU 'borderland' (Del Sarto 2016) and 'contentious borders' (Del Sarto 2017). The 'hybridity' among Europe, Middle East and North Africa attracts scholars' attention a lot. Key issues relating to migration, trade, energy and security render Mediterranean countries interdependent, 'creating a dense space for interaction and cooperation, and for collusion and collision', that produce practices of contestation in the borderlands (Del Sarto and Tholens 2020: 3ff.). Natalia Ribas-Mateos claims that 'borders are not limited to being a mere 'social product' or social process, but are instead alive and dynamic' (2015: 5). Migration flows across the Mediterranean continue despite of EU member states' attempts to close their borders. Migrants have an agency and people on the move corroborate the blurring of nation-state regional borders.

In contrast to the IR literature focused on (state) border control, there is other relevant literature investigating human security. In line with the IR literature on human security (Kaldor, Martin, Selchow 2007; Kerr 2010; Christie 2018), this paper suggests that as long as human security is guaranteed, state security increases, because '[b]y protecting human security, state security is also protected' (Hanlon and Christie 2016: 5). We suggest to think beyond the traditional category of state

security and explain how and why the Mediterranean went global, to become an inherent part of the Global South. In a time when the EU integration model is put under scrutiny by EU politics scholars (Börzel and Risse 2018; Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018; Schimmelfennig 2014; Schmidt 2018), we are experiencing the *fatigue* of a EU-led construction of a region (Adler, Bicchi, Crawford, Del Sarto 2006) reflecting the European neo-liberal experience, because a EU's liberal development model is currently put into question (Paciello, 2020:5). All this considered, the present contribution adopts the concept of 'Mediterranean Global South', where the EU is just a part of it, not the prevailing one. This is an area where policy-issues are negotiated and renegotiated via a contentious interaction, where non-state actors can provide useful knowledge, individuals express their own agency and practices can be an effective feature to address security challenges.

2. A critical approach to explain expanding borders

Critical Security Studies (CSS) provide several insights to better understand Mediterranean security in current times. First of all, CSS draw on the criticism of state-centrism. Their focus is on the real distribution of power, on the on-going processes that regard the individual as the main referent object of security (Bilgin 2018). State-centrism is empirically unhelpful to grasp the nature of Mediterranean politics today, because states in the Mediterranean Global South are not the main providers of security (if ever). We intend to take the individual as the starting point for analysing security in the Mediterranean, in particular human security. And we assume that irregular migration provides a specific context to conceptualise human security. Mediterranean security reflects an area of pluralism and focusing on human security in the Mediterranean represents a challenge to get to the essence of security (Bilgin 2003). The key to conceptualize security is to address the central issue of agency to assess *who* (and *how*) manages (in)security in the Mediterranean area.

Adopting a CSS approach allows to better grasp the political implications of particular security ideas and practices for the Mediterranean. New security challenges require new analytical tools and comprehensive frameworks of analysis. This paper questions the association of the concept of security with the protection of the state, or 'national security', and suggests to take into account human security, migrants' security in particular. This concept of security is essential for the understanding of the Mediterranean in the age of migration, and to answer the crucial question: security for whom? What, or better *who* needs to be secured? How security professionals and bureaucracies practice security becomes essential in filling the *vacuum* left by state-actors in securing individuals. Mediterranean migration is a contentious issue both at EU and EU member state (EUMS) level. As the controversial quota system to redistribute migrants in compliance with the burden-sharing principle of the EU has proved, EUMS have hard times to find common solutions.

Human mobility draws the attention to human (in)security at the borders. State actors are often unable to provide security at the borders and non-state actors such

as International Organizations (IOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) intervene to address migrants' needs and fill a *vacuum*. State-led strategies are challenged by other actors, either groups of individuals such as migrants who express their agency, or IO, NGOs and CSOs, that pursue their own human security strategies (e.g. International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], or Search and Rescue [SAR] NGOs). When EUMS are inactive and/or ineffective, non-state actors often engage in the management of migration with humanitarian practices and prove to react quicker to the emergence (Panebianco 2019b).

Methods of problem-solving not directly related to state-action have gradually developed (and are developing) to manage migration via humanitarian practices. Security professionals and practitioners provide content to security through their words and actions. What matters is the meanings and practices of relevant political actors. The governance of migration involves different actors whose practices are valuable in terms of migrants' security. A plurality of voices and approaches are expressed by the various actors involved: political institutions (at EU, national and local level), IOs, NGOs, CSOs. Their ideational and practical choices are crucial to better understand what happens on the ground (Panebianco 2019b).

The literature on the securitization of migration has become overabundant in the last decades. Since the 1990s security discourses have dominated the academic debate on migration (see Buzan 1991; Wæver, Buzan, Kelstrup, Lemaitre 1993; Huysmans 2000; Lazaridis, Wadia 2015). The political debate in the EU has been strongly influenced by the migration-security nexus often overshadowing the humanitarian dimension of the phenomenon. Following the analytical prism suggested by CSS, this paper departs from the construction of migration as a security concern (Huysmans 2000) to focus on the humanitarian dimension of the migration phenomenon in the Mediterranean. It is the linkage between border security and human security that deserves further research attention.

The paper suggests to investigate the complexification of regional relations deriving from the actual role of those actors that play crucial functions in the provision of solutions to complex security issues. The Mediterranean Global South represents a significant case-study to understand world politics. In this area, as elsewhere, global powers play a crucial influential role in setting rules and policies, alongside with regional powers and non-state actors that perform to address security challenges. An overall comprehensive framework is needed in order to explain the intertwined facets of security, in the dual dimension of state's security and human security in the Mediterranean Global South.

The map of the Mediterranean has changed: a sort of border shift process can be ascribed to the human mobility across the Mediterranean that originated from the Sahel, sub-Saharan countries, or central Asia. However, focusing on EUMS' action does not provide an exhaustive picture of what is taking place on the ground. To better understand the Mediterranean Global South, it is useful to explore the initiatives currently conducted in the area. The regional order can only be investigated by

focusing on the regional problem-solving strategies that are conducted by state and non-state actors. Humanitarian practices are emerging as an effective alternative to states' border control. The EU has externalized the solution of relevant problems, therefore, regional initiatives tend to project the EU's role beyond the definition of European neighbourhood. The Mediterranean Global South is featured by globalization, interconnection, interdependence. Due to blurred frontiers, people move across the borders and problems extend as well over the states' frontiers. Non-state actors provide humanitarian practices and contribute to the management of human flows (Panebianco, 2019b).

3. Rethinking borders in the Mediterranean space: human security at risk crossing the borders, surfing the waves, or blocked at sea

Irregular flows from the Global South to the Global North render migration one key feature of our times. Although an emergency frame has often been applied to explain the current migration flows across the Mediterranean seawaters, Mediterranean migration is rather a structural condition of this age of migration (Attinà 2018: 50). However, over time migratory routes change according to contingent conditions. In the last 30 years, migration flows across the Mediterranean Sea have experienced various routes and exploited different entry points to Europe, depending on specific circumstances: through the Gibraltar Straits and the Adriatic in the 1990s, via the Canary Islands in the 2000s, increasingly from North Africa since 2011, and massively through the Eastern Mediterranean in 2015.

The migration crisis of the 2010s, in particular the refugee crisis of 2015, has brought to the fore issues of border control and security at the EU borders. In the decade 2009-2019 arrivals to Europe via Mediterranean routes were constantly registered; the Eastern route had a peak in 2015 and the Central Mediterranean route had a longer peak between mid-2013 and mid-2017 (source: EU infographics, European Council/Council of the European Union, FRONTEX data). In 2015 more than 1 million refugees, mainly escaping from the Syrian war, entered Europe via the Eastern route. Fences, barbwire and physical walls were then built at intra-EU borders, adding other barriers to existing legal walls. Populist discourses shaped the political debate of several EU member states, putting migration, and the fight against migration via border control, high in the European agenda (Grande, Schwarzbözl, Fatke 2019).

Since the early 1990s migration has been securitized and border security management has attracted the attention of politicians, media and public opinion (Waeber, Buzan, Kelstrup, Lemaitre 1993; Huysmans 2000; Bigo 2000; Bigo, Tsoukala 2008; Balzacq, Léonard, Ruzicka 2016; Hartevelde, Schaper, De Lange, Van Der Brug 2018). Yet, everyday performances of migration management suggest that securitization does not provide a fully understanding of the phenomenon and practices to address migration. 'Politicizing security' (Bilgin 2018: 69) allows instead to scrutinize security in practice. Conceptualizing security to uncover its political

characters and focusing on the contribution of myriads of security actors allows a better understanding of human (in)security. Dealing with human security implies to focus upon migrants at risk crossing the EU borders, surfing the waves under difficult weather conditions on run-down boats, or even worse when they remain blocked at sea, hostage on SAR NGOs denied disembarkation on a safe port due to EU member states' decisions at the edge of legal practices. In the literature on human security, humanitarian practices are emerging as a counterweight to security discourses on migration. IOs and NGOs reports on the inhumane conditions of migrants kept in Libyan detention camps or cruel treatment of migrants and refugees by the Libyan Coast Guard prove that border control is a controversial phenomenon.

Border control strategies and decisions are crucial to assess who is legitimate to cross the border and who is not. In current times the distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration has become difficult to be ascertained. And irregular migrants are destined to increase if entering EU member states legally at official border crossings becomes more difficult. Moreover, once they arrive in the EU, they cannot be recognised as legitimate individuals in the European territory. Migrants escape for various reasons. Scholars generally agree that migration is a global phenomenon which has multiple causes (Attinà 2018; Bettini 2017; Carling, Schewel 2018; De Haas 2011; Geddes 2015; Van Hear, Bakewell, Long 2018). Alongside people fleeing from armed conflicts and persecutions for political opinions, religion, sexual orientation, or nationality, which entitle to legal protection according to the Geneva Convention of 1951, there are also other causes forcing people to move and leave their home country, such as climate change, demographic pressure, or structural poverty.

In this age of migration, regional flows cannot be stopped. Being aware that migrants are often perceived as sources of insecurity in receiving societies, but also that the receiving communities are put under stress when faced with arrivals in high numbers, to address the issue of irregular migrants' security implies to focus on the real *locus* where migration management takes place. Mediterranean migration reveals the interdependence between sending, transit and destination countries, between societies of emigration and immigration, and suggests that common action is required to respond to globalization trends. In terms of security at the borders, it is essential to focus on one part of migrants' adventure, namely the journey to Europe, on their search for protection. But other aspects of migrants' integration (or lack of) in the destination/receiving countries are relevant.

We claim that it is the irregularization of migration that renders migration insecure, because the border regulations are inadequate to face mobility trends and render violations of border regulations almost necessary. This is true in two respects. First of all, as far as the journey is concerned, irregular migrants are in the hands of organized crime; secondly, regarding the insecurity of migrants who enter illegally into the EU, they remain in a *limbo* without registration, *i.e.* with no access to health care, nor to education, nor to job opportunities. This inevitably fosters sources of insecurity before and after their risky journeys. IOs such as the IOM or UNHCR and

Amnesty International denounce the terrible life conditions in detention centers in Libya and call for the international community to intervene so to address migrants' insecurity before getting to Europe.

If the governance of migration prioritizes border closure, it becomes irrelevant if migrants are mostly asylum seekers coming from sub-Saharan countries entitled to international protection for humanitarian reasons. Once a EUMS such as Italy or Malta refuses to disembark migrants there is no way to verify if they can apply for asylum. Faced with such high numbers of arrivals, states at the EU borders such as Italy struggle to identify asylum seekers to respect international provisions. Under the terms of Article 14 of the 1948 UN Declaration on Human Rights, all people have the right to seek asylum from persecution in other states. This provision is reaffirmed by the 1951 Refugee Convention which asserts the right of all to freedom from natural disaster, civil war, ethnic, religious, and political oppression. But reality tells that international protection is currently far from guaranteed. To control the borders, EUMS do not hesitate to challenge the International law. In the Case *Hirsi Jamaa et als vs Italia*, judgement dated 23 February 2012, Italy had been condemned by the European Court for Human Rights for having violated the *non-refoulement* principle. Nevertheless, in the years 2018-2019 the former Italian Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini, adopted the so-called 'closed ports' policy which could be considered at the outskirts of legal provisions because it consisted in denying migrants' disembarkation without proceeding to their identification.

4. The EU and its neighbours: the *fatigue* of the EU as a regional player

The conceptualisation of the Mediterranean as 'Mediterranean Global South' requires a few considerations on the EU as a regional player at the eve of the 2020s. To face the variety of the regional challenges, over time the EU has adopted new cooperation frameworks or adapted the existing ones moving from the multi-dimensional regional platforms provided by the EMP, to bilateral relations framed within the ENP and issue-based cooperation fostered by the UfM. Business development and employment, higher education and research, social and civil affairs, water and environment, transport and urban development, energy or climate action are not just administrative departments of the UfM; they reflect the most relevant issues in today's intergovernmental regional cooperation, following a functionalist approach aimed at solving human beings' problems of the every-day life. In our view, it is not the philosophy behind Euro-Mediterranean relations that has changed, as Kristina Kausch and Richard Youngs had suggested (2009), but rather the approach to achieve the common goals, namely peace, security, prosperity and mutual understanding in the Mediterranean. Investing in cooperation and mutual exchange at several levels remains the EU's main goal, but the EU approach has become more pragmatic (Bicchi 2011; Huber, Paciello 2020). Structural changes bring about a different distribution of power and specific strategies have to be identified to address the citizens' real needs. Since the neo-liberal project that the EU had promoted in

the relations with third countries is not necessarily shared by the Mediterranean 'partners' or 'neighbours', as they are called within EMP or ENP, decentring analytical perspectives have been adopted to identify the different challenges and priorities set by Southern Mediterranean neighbours (Huber 2020). A decentring research agenda is emerging to unpack different priority views and security conceptions departing from EU cores to focus instead on challenges as seen in the peripheries (broadly conceived). The understanding of international migration governance in particular is privileging the viewpoints of origin and transit countries, non-state actors and include both urban and rural perspectives (Triandafyllidou 2020). To avoid euro-centric views, a plural understanding of research issues is attracting the scholarly attention.

The adoption of the ENP in 2004 had marked a shift from regionalism to bilateralism. With the ENP, the EU sought to reframe relations with its neighbouring countries to be more effective. Potentially, the EU provided the same chances and opportunities to the neighbours, but in practice cooperation progressed on a bilateral basis (Kelley 2006). For some scholars, EMP, ENP and UfM are overlapping policy frames (Cardwell 2011), but progressively the reference to democratic reforms has reduced and the multi-dimensional security concept left the way to prioritization of cooperation areas. The years 2010s started with the so-called Arab Spring and with an *élan* for democracy promotion. Within one decade, resilient authoritarianism has almost monopolised the political and research agenda. Taken hostage of the security-stability nexus, the EU too often considers that illiberal regimes can be reliable allies to contain security threats. The Arab upheavals demonstrated (first and foremost to the EU) that democratization is not a linear process; it needs to be internalized and embedded in the society at large to produce long-lasting political democratic changes (Panebianco 2012). Otherwise, protests can easily turn into resilient authoritarianism (Diamond 2002; Levitsky, Way 2002; Murphy 2008). As Schmitter and Sika argue, democratization is always an ambidextrous process: on the one hand it triggers a universalistic set of norms and processes, but on the other it involves adaptations to the local structures (Schmitter, Sika 2017: 443).

The EU can only play a political role in the Mediterranean as long as it contributes to solve problems relevant for the citizens. If the EU is challenged at home, it cannot imagine recognition from the outside (Huber 2020). The Euro crisis first, then the Schengen crisis and Brexit have absorbed EU energies (see Biermann, Guerin, Jagduber, Rittberger, Weiss 2019; Börzel, Risse 2018; Caporaso 2018; etc.). Rising populism and Euroscepticism in Europe have made the EU introspective (Bauboeck 2018).

The debate on 'Normative Power Europe' launched by the renowned article written by Ian Manners in the early 2000s (Manners 2002), then revised at its decennial (Manners 2013), has raised concerns on the EU capacity to act as a democracy promoter (Pace 2014; Panebianco 2006). The EU promotion of liberal values such as democracy and human rights proved to be ambivalent. Stability in the Mediterranean remains a priority in the EU political agenda so to prevent security threats from affecting EU countries. It would be misleading and *naïf* to assume that the EU promotes ethical stances via foreign policy. The EU-Turkey agreement signed in 2016 allows for EU borders' control

by proxy' (Panebianco, 2020); via a border-shifting process, EU bordering countries are mandated to manage security at the EU borders. In a similar way, the Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2017 to develop cooperation to address illegal immigration, human trafficking, fuel smuggling and reinforcement of border security, was backed by the EU as being part of the externalization of migration management to contain migration flows (Panebianco 2020: 12). Yet, the control of human mobility through EU borders' closure and agreements with EU border countries challenges the 'humane' management of migration portrayed in the European Agenda on migration (European Commission 2015) and more assertively in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (European Commission 2020).

In the absence of a shared common approach to migration, externalisation has become one of the EU priorities in the management of migratory pressures at the EU borders (Panebianco 2020), at the expenses of the support of liberal economic and political principles beyond Europe's borders. What the EU portrays as a policy inspired by the responsibility to protect the migrants (Panebianco, Fontana 2018) can be easily translated into an externalization process short of human rights' respect guarantee on the border countries' side, as in the Libyan case. This is an emblematic example of EU cooperation with Mediterranean neighbours responsible of human rights' violations and atrocities against migrants, as reported by humanitarian organizations such as IOM or Amnesty International.

It is the nature of EU relations with its neighbours that is to be redefined and the capacity to transform its neighbours to be questioned. The EU's role in world politics and its capacity to foster a liberal political and economic model has attracted the scholarly attention for more than a decade, stimulated by the institutional reforms adopted by the Lisbon Treaty and the supposedly strengthening of the EU as an international power. Europe's slide from liberalism (Youngs 2010: 6) has become a *fait accompli* and has suggested new approaches and paradigms to frame EU foreign policy studies. More broadly, the debate on the crisis of the neo-liberal order has widely attracted the scholars' attention.

A cosmopolitan liberal model proved ineffective to face the current regional challenges. This brings to the fore, once more, the need to conceive European foreign policy as a sum of EU foreign policies, to seize the EU effective capacity to have a role to play in the Mediterranean. Not so long ago Hix and Høyland (2011: 3) pointed out the issue of EU foreign *policies*. What the multipolar global system requires today is a flexible analytical approach according to the foreign policy issues in the agenda. At the beginning of the 2020s, the liberal superpower argument that was very popular at the end of the Cold War has lost its relevance (Lucarelli 2020). Empirical research has demonstrated that only if and when third countries, Mediterranean 'neighbors' or 'partners', decide to adopt EU rules and norms because they find it advantageous, the EU can socialize them to EU rules and norms (Di Peri, Zardo 2017; Fontana 2017; Zardo 2020).

By investigating EU foreign policy/ies, scholars have retrenched from discussion on the EU's promotion of 'European values', that is a difficult role to assess both

scholarly and politically. The most notable trend in EU foreign policy is currently the declining conviction in liberal internationalism (Lucarelli 2020). The debate is centred on a sort of norm adoption selection, because 'outsiders' chose to copy only parts of the *acquis communautaire* (Wiener 2015). As the model on the external governance suggests, in some issue areas norm-sharing is produced more than in others (Lavenex, Schimmelfennig 2009). In some realms of foreign relations, e.g. dealing with energy security, Europe's influence comes about through the transfer of its own rules and legal norms to other countries and organizations as a form of external governance distinct from traditional concepts of power projection. Thus, the extension of EU's own values does not apply on a large scale, but only to some issue-areas, if and when conditions for norm transfer occur. This is currently the case with climate change, that has officially entered the EU political agenda under the German EU presidency and assessed at the European Council in December 2020.

Since the so-called 2015 refugee crisis, when more than 1 million refugees escaping from the Syrian conflict entered the EU via the eastern land route, the EU showed the 'organized hypocrisy' of the Common European Asylum System: despite the rhetoric on EU values to be defended also in foreign policy, the EU is investing on border control (Lavenex 2018). The burden-sharing principle that is conceived as one of the pillars of EU values has been put on a hold because the redistribution of irregular migrants has been contested by Central and Eastern EUMS states refusing to respect the redistribution quotas set by the Council of the European Union following to a proposal of the European Commission.

In line with this debate, this paper does not investigate the principles *di per sé* guiding EU action in the Mediterranean, but rather suggests to explore the content of regional cooperation, or rather the lack of. What matters more in many security aspects is the degree of unity between EUMS. Since the early 2010s, old and new security threats acquired relevance in the Mediterranean. Alongside energy security, climate change, terrorism and the rise of Daesh, migration flows have become a key political issue leading to further regional cooperation. However, tensions have emerged among EU member states, eventually contributing to domestic EU crises. The EUMS have not reacted to migration with 'more Europe', but rather with a strategic 'non-use' of Europe (Slominski, Trauner 2018).

5. Preliminary Conclusions

This paper has highlighted various dilemmas on security challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean space after the 2011 Arab uprisings. To conceptualize the Mediterranean Global South, it challenged actions and strategies that do not seem to be apt to manage effectively regional crises such as the migration one. In contrast to the IR literature focused on (state) border control, there is other relevant literature investigating human security, suggesting to focus on migrants as individuals searching for a better life and in need of protection. Alongside the language associated with the securitization of migration there is 'a humanitarian concern

expressed for the lives and well-being of 'irregular' migrants precisely as humans with the same fundamental rights as EU citizens' (Vaughan-Williams 2015: 3).

The main advantage of this contribution is the issue-oriented approach and the focus on human beings. It has allowed to highlight the effectiveness of the humanitarian practices of non-state actors involved in managing human flows in the Mediterranean. The intersection between human (in)security and mobility in the Mediterranean draws the attention on the agency of people on the move in, around and across the Mediterranean Global South. Regional issues cannot be confined within state-borders. The research agenda on security in the Mediterranean Global South includes various, complex security challenges. Critical scholarship on security well includes and extends existing studies. CSS provide promising research paths centred on human beings and processes led by non-state actors, yet rethinking of security in the Mediterranean Global South is far from accomplished. There is a clear need for further investigation, so to produce more sustainable policy-oriented research and produce applicative knowledge.

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