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**The Differential European Union Regional Economic Integration
Promotion Strategy in the Middle East and North Africa: European
Union Economic Development Needs, Strategic Global Power
Competition and Regional Agency**

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**The Differential European Union Regional Economic Integration
Promotion Strategy in the Middle East and North Africa:
European Union Economic Development Needs, Strategic Global
Power Competition and Regional Agency**

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Introduction

In the last years, potential security threats from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) linked to migration and terrorism have been increasingly the focus of the European Union (EU). The EU has thus promoted a “security-development nexus” towards the region, establishing a direct correlation between economic development and security in the building of regional stability (Keukeleire & Raube, 2013, p.4). Given the central role of economics in the foundations of the EU and the aspiration to export its own regional exemplar, the EU has opted for building trade relations and economic integration with and among MENA states (Antkiewicz & Momani, 2009).

The EU established the Mediterranean region as its focal point in the MENA through the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). The EMP has its roots in the 1995 Barcelona Process, which aimed to build a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (Ferabolli, 2022). In 2004, the EU partially replaced the EMP with the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which seeks to strengthen the relations and integration with Eastern and Southern neighbors and increasingly focuses on bilateral relations. MENA members of the ENP include Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia (Zorob, 2016).

The EU has also pushed for greater intra-regional economic integration and has imposed ENP conditionalities on the signatories of the free trade Agadir Agreement between Morocco, Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia in 2004 (Momani, 2010). The set aims of the Agadir Agreement include (1) the creation of a free trade area among the signatories to liberalize trade relations and enhance closer integration; (2) to additionally support and speed up the implementation of both the EU Barcelona Process and the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) introduced below; and (3) to boost the member economies through the attraction of cross-Agadir investment and foreign direct investment. The reach of these aims practically included the planned removal of all tariffs and non-tariff barriers by 2006, with some exceptions (Agadir Agreement, 2004; Oumazzane, 2018). Although the EU expanded the agreement to Palestine and Lebanon in 2020, the impact and outcomes are debated, and regional integration in the MENA remains comparatively low (Aboushady & Zaki, 2022). Due to changing global political and economic conditions, the EU expanded its strategy and started promoting a free trade area with the Gulf cooperation countries (GCC) and involved countries such as Iran, Iraq and Yemen in free trade negotiations (Brunelli, 2011).

Harders et al. (2017) and Zorob (2018) criticized the EU approach as incoherent and leading to the region's fragmentation through a complex network of agreements, impeding progress in broader, more comprehensive regional integration attempts initiated by MENA states. This especially applies to the GAFTA initiative, which encompasses 18 Arab countries. The Arab League, an intergovernmental organization founded in 1945, started GAFTA in 1997 (Johansson-Nogués, 2020). GAFTA primarily focused on tariff reduction among the Arab League states and paid limited attention to non-tariff barriers such as a coordinated administration. It thus has been criticized for only promoting shallow and not deep integration (Zank, 2010). GAFTA is also not accepted as a regional free trade agreement by the EU. The lack of acceptance is justified based on a perceived non-compliance of the agreement with provisions of Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) under the umbrella of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Zorob, 2018). Since intra-regional integration in the MENA remains one of the lowest globally, and scholars often linked regional integration to economic prosperity, this represents a significant burden to overcome to improve the standing of the MENA in the global economy (Aboushady & Zaki, 2022; EIAly, 2015).

The fragmentation in the regional promotion strategy of the EU and the lack of support for the largest regional integration project GAFTA appears as puzzling. Given that the EU strategy emphasized a need for economic prosperity in the whole MENA to counter security threats (Özkurt, 2019), the increased economic integration of more extensive parts of the MENA would fulfill this goal. This thesis will therefore examine the following research question: *Why is the EU employing differential regional economic integration promotion strategies in the MENA?* It will look at the by the EU unsupported case GAFTA and the Agadir Agreement, the regionalist project most integrated with the EU in the MENA. To guide the analysis further, this thesis will investigate the following sub-questions:

1. How do EU economic and ideological dynamics and developments influence the EU regional economic integration promotion strategies in the MENA?
2. How do global power dynamics in the MENA affect the EU regional promotion strategy?
3. How do the regional MENA preferences and economic dynamics enable or limit the EU regional economic integration promotion strategy?

Former literature identified possible explanatory approaches to the research question rooted in different schools of thought. One strand of literature that this thesis will investigate as part of the literature review focuses on the explanatory role of geopolitics and security.

Additionally, the literature review will examine the work of another group of scholars who focused on economic theory, specifically, hub-and-spoke system theory and the spaghetti bowl phenomenon. Further, project-specific literature on the Agadir and GAFTA project outcomes will be analyzed. The project-specific literature primarily employed a neoclassical analysis. In contrast, critical political economy (CPE) literature on the MENA provides an in-depth investigation of the regional power dynamics and allows for integrating historical insights. Thus, the analysis could identify a disconnect between the project-specific literature and the former CPE literature. Hence, a more comprehensive analysis of the Agadir Agreement and GAFTA from a CPE perspective that offers the addition of the missing elements identified in the current literature is needed. It enables the establishment of the role of the agreements in the EU strategy and embeds them in the broader regional and global dynamics and thus provides the tools to answer the posed research questions.

The CPE theoretical framework used for this analysis focuses on the conception of neoliberalism, trade, imperialism, strategic competition, and regional integration. It enables the understanding of the promotion of regional integration as driven by the neoliberal capitalist expansionary market mechanism. Additionally, regional integration allows for the imperialist spread of EU norms and the legitimation of its regionalism model to build its power position in the global political economy. The dynamics of global competition in the MENA with the United States and especially China's rising power limit the EU's room for maneuver. Local agencies, preferences, and winning and losing dynamics from the EU promotion strategy within the partner states further affect the scope of action available to the EU. Thus, CPE provides a holistic theoretical framework incorporating the interaction of the global, regional, and local scales in an explanatory approach for the differential EU regional economic integration promotion strategies.

This thesis will employ a critical relational dialectical method to build on this theoretical framework. The method perceives current social structures as changeable through human agency. It further views all elements of the transformable social reality as dialectically related, making up a social totality (Bieler, 2005). This social totality arises as a consequence of the components' actions but should also be perceived as emerging and developing. The method, therefore, primarily investigates the relations between the components and with the totality and examines the dynamics and changes in these relations over time (Hanieh, 2018). The key tool of the employed critical relational dialectical method is the "power of abstraction" (Nixon, 2012, p. 446). To grasp the totality, it must be abstracted and thus must be broken down into components. The abstractions used for the analysis will be based on the three hypotheses:

one is related to the European Union scale, one to the global competition scale, and one to the MENA regional scale. Additionally, a framework of three indicators measuring each of the hypotheses will be developed to answer the posed research question.

Using this framework, I argue that the relational interplay of influences and dynamics at three levels: the EU, the global competition, and the regional MENA scale form the EU regional economic integration promotion strategy. On the EU scale, the capitalist expansion mechanism paired with the imperialist ideology present a driving factor for the EU's seeking of influence in the regional integration processes in the MENA. The economic potential of MENA industries, such as textile and clothing and logistics, to fulfill EU economic needs further enhance this dynamic. However, while a clear economic potential of the region could be recognized, limitations to the EU influence and ability to adopt a broader MENA integration strategy arise from the regional competitive dynamics. While competition in the Agadir Agreement area is primarily limited to the US ally, the rise of China and, to a lesser extent, Russia challenge the EU influence in other member states of the GAFTA agreement.

Additionally, the agency of the EU partner states in the MENA must be considered. The agreement contents reveal the EU's evident ability to influence the Agadir Agreement's regulatory framework but not the GAFTA contents. Moreover, the overlapping regionalism conception driven by economic development and closer integration needs of the subregional groups of the Agadir Agreement and the GCC, in contrast to the sovereignty strive of the Arab League, enhances the uneven EU promotion strategy landscape. Lastly, the profitability of the EU strategy for partner state elites plays a central role in influencing the outcomes. Thus, the complex interplay of global, regional, and local developments shapes the differential EU regional economic integration promotion strategy in the MENA.

The thesis will first conduct a literature review, examining possible explanatory approaches established by scholars, followed by the introduction of the critical political economy theoretical framework. Consequently, the critical relational dialectical method and the data collection will be outlined. The analysis will be done in three chapters. The first one will focus on the EU scale and investigate the EU policy ideological discourse, the lobby influence on policymaking, and the EU economic development needs. The second chapter investigates the global competition scale, examining competitors' historical and current political-economic influence in the MENA and the competing trade and regional integration initiatives. The last analytical chapter analyzes the regional MENA scale and specifically examines the adoption of Western values, norms, and standards in the Agadir and GAFTA Agreements. Further, it looks at the preferences and attitudes of the local populations and

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MENA states and the local actors' winning and losing dynamics from the EU promotion strategy. Lastly, the thesis will be concluded with a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

In order to embed the research question in former findings, a literature review will be conducted. Firstly, literature focusing on geopolitical and security factors as explanations for the EU strategy in the MENA will be investigated and critically assessed. Consequently, academic literature centered on economic explanatory terms will be examined. This section will introduce and analyze hub-and-spoke theory and its relationship with south-south integration. Further, the spaghetti bowl phenomenon will be investigated as a possible driver of the EU strategy. Lastly, the disconnect between the project-specific literature employing primarily neoclassical economic theory and the critical political economy investigation of the region will be unveiled. A conclusion for the further research approach will be drawn based on the findings.

1.1 Geopolitics and Security

Some scholars focused on geopolitical and security considerations as driving factors of the EU strategy for the MENA. Thereby, trade policy is seen as a vital instrument of the EU to attain foreign policy goals due to the extensive shared economic EU policy framework and powers held by the EU in the area. Hence, it is the field in which the EU can present itself as an actor with a single voice and thus establish political leverage. This is especially the case given the limited nature of the EU's shared foreign and security policy framework and the merely civilian powers held by the institution (Antkiewicz & Momani, 2009; Brunelli, 2011). Scholars further highlighted that geopolitical interests explain the attempt of the EU to create "deep integration," including political aspects in its interregional initiatives (Romagnoli & Mengoni, 2009, p.71). The geopolitical interests of the EU in the MENA are identified as closely linked to its strategic competition with other influential powers, such as the US, and rising powers like China in the region (Antkiewicz & Momani, 2009). Given the position of the MENA as an area dominated by external intervention, it is, therefore, a region central to the EU's ability to gain importance as an international actor (Özkurt, 2019).

Security-focused scholars further found that events such as 9/11 and the Arab Spring increasingly led to the securitization of EU regional MENA policies. The region is thereby increasingly portrayed as the origin of terrorism and migration flows, which threaten the security of the EU member states. This portrayal in the media and by populist politicians had

significant implications for public opinion within the EU and the EU regional MENA policy (Özkurt, 2019). Due to this securitization, Brunelli (2011) and Özkurt (2019) observed a closer connection between promoting economic prosperity and security. Thus, the closer intra-regional and interregional economic integration of, for instance, the EU and the GCC countries are seen as a tool for stabilization in the region. Some scholars even interpreted the EU strategy as an attempt of the EU to contribute to and aid the solving of crises such as the Afghan and Yemen war (Brunelli, 2011).

However, the literature discussed does not explain the differential nature of the EU approach. It instead would suggest the profitability for the EU to promote deeper economic integration among the largest regionalist initiatives in the MENA. Thus, especially a closer examination of the EU capitalist economic development needs and interests is missing from the analysis. This examination would aid the better understanding of the expansion mechanisms and its acceleration by the neoliberal economic ideas of the EU economy. While this strand of literature could explain a differentiation through closer relations to states that are geographically closer and deemed as more important, the expansion of the EU strategy to almost all country groups of the MENA – although separately – shows that this does not seem to be the driver of the differential EU strategies. Further, while including the MENA as a locality of strategic competition represents an important aspect this strand of literature contributes, insufficient attention is given to the colonial origins and imperialist dynamics explaining the external intervention by global powers.

1.2 Economic Theory

Other scholars looked at the EU strategy towards the MENA primarily in economic terms and employed hub-and-spoke system theory and the spaghetti bowl phenomenon. The economics focus also applies to the project-specific literature analyzing the Agadir Agreement and GAFTA

1.2.1 Hub-and-Spoke System Theory and South-South Integration

Scholars identified the system of a combination of bilateral trade agreements of the EU with the states involved in the EMP and smaller multilateral trade agreements as a hub-and-spoke structure (Ferabolli, 2022; Zorob, 2018). A hub-and-spoke system consists of a large advanced market – the hub – that established trade relations with smaller states – the spokes (Ferabolli, 2022). Consequently, the hub profits from access to the spokes' markets, while spokes

confronted with difficulties to compete in the hub's market face trade and investment diversion and are often marginalized (Wonnacott, 1996). Restrictive rules of origin (ROO), which determine what percentage of value must be added within a country for it to be considered as having the "economic nationality" of the country, worsen this effect (Zorob, 2016, p.176).

However, South-South integration among the spokes was found to potentially counter the adverse effects of the hub-and-spokes system for the spokes (Zorob, 2018). It could enable the spokes to gain from economies of scale, increase their leverage in negotiations as a more unitary actor and raise their competitiveness in the hub's market (Baldwin & Veneables, 1995; Schiff & Winters, 2003). Though this is only possible if the transaction costs in intra-regional trade are sufficiently diminished, the industries of the spokes are compatible, and efficiency can be increased (Zorob, 2016).

Therefore, a possible explanation for the differential EU strategy would be that the EU is attempting to maintain its advantageous position as the hub in the region. It, therefore, prefers the Agadir Agreement, which entails fewer spokes and adopted the EU ROO, allowing for more control over the intraregional integration by the EU. GAFTA, if it fulfills the conditions for South-South integration mentioned above, could limit the EU's advantaged market access in the MENA and increase the political leverage of the MENA states. The findings of Peridy & Abedini (2014) and Parra et al. (2016) that GAFTA led to a substantial increase in trade among the Arab countries while the Agadir Agreement only brought limited increased trade flows support this explanation.

1.2.2 Spaghetti Bowl Phenomenon

A related approach offering another answer to the posed research question is rooted in the spaghetti bowl phenomenon coined by Bhagwati (1995). Bhagwati (1995) argued that a complex network of different trade agreements – the spaghetti bowl - with a complicated overlap of different rules for tariff reduction and ROOs implicitly could lead to the actual raising of trade barriers. This is related to the considerable administrative burden, higher transaction costs, and the barriers to trade with non-members (Baldwin, 2011; Bhagwati et al., 1998). Thus, protectionist incentives of the EU could also drive the implementation of strict ROOs and the building of a complex framework of trade relations. The protectionist explanation could be linked to the emphasis on the protection of the agricultural sector by the EU, which is also highly subsidized (Nishimoto, 2019). The findings that agricultural products were increasingly included in the GAFTA agreements while the Agadir Agreement includes a

clause for the exception of agricultural products still protected under EU agreements (Agadir Agreement, 2004) indicate the validity of this explanation.

However, while this approach offers appealing explanations for the differences in the EU strategy, it remains limited to the immediate economic context. It does not consider the broader global economic dynamics of the capitalist system. Although hub-and-spoke system theory includes the asymmetrical power between trade partners, it does not consider the magnitude and origins of these power differentials. Therefore, the inclusion of the historical context and consequent social realities and global dynamics, which are necessary to answer the research question fully, are missing from the analysis.

1.3 Project-specific literature

Similarly, the project-specific literature examining the Agadir Agreement and GAFTA employed a neoclassical perspective and statistical models to examine the impact of the agreement on the trade flows between the members and the EU (Harb & Abou Shady, 2016; El-Sahli, 2021; Escribano & Jordan, 1999; Schlumberger, 2008; Peridy, 2005; Achour & Hadji, 2021; Peridy & Abedini, 2014; Peridy & Ghoneim, 2009; Lemmoshi, 2013; Boughanmi, 2016; Soliman & Khalifa, 2016; Tolba, 2010; Hoekman & Zarrouk, 2009; Kourtelis, 2021). Regarding the GAFTA agreement, Peridy & Abedini (2014) and El-Sahli (2021), for instance, used gravity models to find a regional trade increase of 20% among project members. However, others found that the remaining administration costs and non-trade barriers remain in place (Hoekman & Zarrouk, 2009; El-Sahli, 2021). Using similar methods, scholars found ambiguous trade effects of the Agadir Agreement. While Tolba (2010), for example, found a minimal effect of the agreement on the actual economic and political integration of related parties, Achour & Hadji (2021) found a positive effect. Kourtelis (2021), on the other hand, examined a reinforcement of former weaknesses of the agreement members and increased load bearing due to EU competition.

Thus, a substantive body of literature investigating the welfare effects and the specific project characteristics and outcomes exists. However, none of the scholars have critically investigated the position of the economic integration projects within the regional and competitive global power dynamics. Therefore, for the understanding of the EU strategy central economic mechanisms such as the expansionary drive of the capitalist system were not examined. Further, this body of literature leaves out historical imperialist and broader social-political dynamics at play in the relations between the EU and the MENA states involved in

the projects. Hence, a more comprehensive critical dialectical relational analysis that encompasses the mentioned factors is needed to gain a holistic understanding of the position of the Agadir Agreement and GAFTA within the EU regional economic integration promotion strategy.

1.4 Critical Political Economy

An in-depth analysis of the regional power dynamics could be found in the works of scholars employing a critical political economy (CPE) theoretical approach. Hanieh (2013) and Hinnebusch (2011) found that the MENA is prone to external domination given its strategic importance for trade and natural resources. More specifically, regarding the EU agenda in the MENA, scholars have identified different EU interests but have overlappingly found that the EU is seeking to increase its power position within the region and holds a hegemonic position (Fawcett, 2016; Harders & Legrenzi, 2008; Holden, 2010; Momani, 2010; Hanieh, 2013; Zorob, 2018). Momani (2010) highlighted a hierarchical approach of the EU that primarily promotes economic interests and alignment with the EU rules and models. Additionally, it was found that this alignment has led to the EU's exploitation and domination of markets and to the reformation of internal and external regional relationships (Holden, 2010; Hanieh, 2013).

Williams (2014) further employed a critical neo-Gramscian framework in analyzing the EU-Caribbean trade relations, producing an in-depth analysis of the asymmetrical power relations presented by the EU as a "partnership of equals" to hide its dominance. Thus, this approach highlights that the ability of the EU to implement its universalized ROOs and other trade rules in the case of the Agadir Agreement but not the GAFTA Agreement could incentivize the EU to employ differential strategies. Similarly, multiple scholars highlighted the role of international organizations such as the EU as bearers of the hegemonic ideas and interests of the elites (Antkiewicz & Momani, 2009; Gill, 1993). Hence, another possible answer could be that the elite interests are reflected in the fragmented differential strategy of the regional trade promotion of the EU.

While the established CPE literature offers valuable insights into aspects that are absent from former project-specific scholarly work, a detailed analysis of the interaction of the project and broader socio-economic and political global and regional dynamics is missing so far, thus establishing the relevance of the posed research aim.

1.5 Chapter Conclusion

The literature review has shown a disconnect between the project-specific literature and the CPE literature that considers broader regional and global dynamics. The Agadir Agreement and GAFTA both have primarily been observed from a neoclassical political economy perspective or in isolation from broader regional and global dynamics. Thus, a need for a more comprehensive analysis of the Agadir Agreement and GAFTA from a CPE perspective that offers the addition of the missing elements identified in the current literature could be recognized. It enables the establishment of the role of the agreements in the EU strategy and embeds them in the broader local, regional, and global dynamics and thus provides the tools to answer the posed research questions.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

As could be established based on former literature, the employment of CPE theory allows for the analysis of the complex interrelation of global, regional and local dynamics in the economic and political sphere (Ryner, 2015). As a form of critical theory, it questions the status quo and especially the capitalist mode of production. Thereby, the power and domination dynamics and patterns of hierarchies and exploitation are in focus, allowing for investigating related differential dynamics between the EU and the MENA parties (O'Brien & Williams, 2016; Hinnebusch, 2011). While CPE consists of many strands, such as Marxist, post-colonial, neo-Gramscian and feminist approaches, which vary in their key concepts and focus points, the general focus on uneven economic and political outcomes rooted in power differentials unites the strands under the CPE umbrella. This chapter will therefore conceptualize key concepts needed for the CPE theoretical framework. First, neoliberalism will be defined, followed by the introduction of the CPE conception of trade. Consequently, the conception of imperialist and strategic competition will be outlined and linked to a CPE understanding of regional integration in this context.

2.1 Conception of Neoliberalism

The start of the considered timeframe of this analysis coincides with the rapid global spread of neoliberalism after the end of the Cold War and its constitutionalization through the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 (De Ville & Orbie, 2013). Therefore, the CPE conception of neoliberalism is central to the theoretical basis of this analysis. Neoliberal policies are widely understood as consisting of privatization efforts, decreased state intervention in markets, reduced government social spending, and the promotion of free global capital flows. While a vast range and discussion about the extent of these measures and cleavage between theory and practice persist, neoliberalism generally can be summarized as the rising dominance of market commands in all areas of human endeavor (Hanieh, 2013).

Within CPE, the neoliberalism concept of Harvey holds a central position. He defined neoliberalism as a project of the elites “that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade”

(Harvey, 2005a, p. 2). Its emergence is viewed as necessitated by the accumulation drive of capital in the increasingly internationalized market economy and thus as dictated by the needs of the capitalist elites (Harvey, 2005a; Hanieh, 2013). From a CPE perspective, neoliberalism provides an instrument both for the reinforcement of the dominance of the capitalist class on a national and global scale and for safeguarding the expansion of capitalist reproduction globally. Thus, this conception of neoliberalism prescribes the relational analysis of EU economic and class power developments and global trade developments in the MENA.

2.2 Conception of Trade

Applying this understanding of neoliberalism to trade policy, the combined sped-up internal and external liberalization in the form of multilateral, regional, and bilateral trade agreements can be explained by the expansionist drive of capital and the spatial enlargement of the processes of capitalist class domination across national borders (De Ville & Orbie, 2013). As noted in the Marxist tradition, capitalism, in general, constantly strives to overcome any barriers to market exchange, which is further exaggerated by increased capital development (Hanieh, 2013). This can be explained by the need for continuous profits notwithstanding competition and capital accumulation profit-lowering forces and the ability to circumvent these profit-limiting forces through market expansion (Bailey & Bossuyt, 2013).

CPE scholars have noted that the trade expansion of the market creates an uneven division of power and profits. Differences in the stage of capital development often expose the less developed economies to unviable competition leading to losses and, at the same time creating surplus value for the developed economies (Baran, 1957; Foster & Holleman, 2014; Sheppard, 2012). Therefore, trade is viewed as frequently leading to an unequal exchange between powerful, richer economies – in this case, the EU - and peripheries - the MENA states - creating dependencies and increased power differentials through the concentration of capital in the hands of a few.

2.3 Conception of Imperialism and Strategic Competition

The internationalization and concentration of capital can also be linked to the conception of imperialism and strategic competition employed for this thesis. Harvey (2005b) identified the linkage between the overaccumulation of capital and labor that characterizes global capitalism starting in the 1970s and "new imperialism". He coined the term "spatio-temporal fix". Overaccumulation within a state or another closed territory requires surplus absorption through

either the temporal shift of the surpluses through long-term investments in social expenditures or a geographical shift by expanding to new markets and labor sources. Given the neoliberal preference for territorial market expansion and the uneven global economic development that offers expansion opportunities, ruling capitalist states thus continue to impose their power on new markets (Ashman & Callinicos, 2006; Harvey, 2005b). Key features of this "new imperialism" are the linkage to the progress and civilization dogmas as well as the economic exploitation and dominance through privatization and liberalization demands by global ruling states and elites (Ashman & Callinicos, 2006; Hanieh, 2013).

The overaccumulation of capital and labor simultaneously led to the strategic competition of leading capitalist centers confronted with the need for a spatio-temporal fix (Harvey, 1982). Importantly, in the long run, not all surplus created by overaccumulation can be absorbed, thus feeding the competition among powers fearing the need for devaluation of capital. Geopolitical rivalry can be characterized as a continued dominating logic that did not end with the collapse of the Soviet Union (Callinicos, 2002). Thus, we can draw a clear link between the "new imperialism" definition to the classical Marxist definition of imperialism, whereby capitalism is viewed as the ruling logic and dominated by a small group of competing economic and military leaders (Bukharin, 1929). This conception is especially useful for analyzing the dynamics in the MENA, which are characterized by external control and division by rival global powers, leading to the uneven integration of the region into the global capitalist economic system.

2.4 Conception of Regional Integration

The imperialist and competitive dynamics outlined above created a complex network of regionalities characterized by uneven development and integration (Ashman & Callinicos, 2006). These dynamics can be linked to the neoliberal restructuring of the economy, which aims to fast-track the overcoming of trade barriers. One, especially for the EU central part of the neoliberal project is the spread of regional integration as a means to accelerate globalization (Hurt, 2012). Regional integration and its promotion can thus be understood as a tool for capital expansions that enables the partial overcoming of persisting barriers to global free trade flows. Additionally, it can be characterized as an EU norm exported and imposed through the imperialist mechanism to legitimize the EU's role as a global actor vis-à-vis other global powers. On the other hand, some scholars like Campling (2006) and Morvardi & Hughes (2018) view the economic integration of marginalized states as potentially enabling greater

negotiating power and persistence of the marginalized vis-à-vis larger economic powers. Thus, from a CPE perspective, regional economic integration can either increase existing power differentials or increase marginalized economies' agency, depending on the project inauguration and dynamics.

Therefore, the local agency and dynamics among competing powers in the region must be considered to understand the regional integration dynamics fully. Given the ability to incorporate the experiences of different marginalized groups through a CPE approach, internal regionalism project dynamics and the shaping of different outcomes rooted in the agency of different actors involved can be investigated (Harders, 2015). Further, as Hanieh (2013) put forward, broader regional competition dynamics must be incorporated into a holistic and relational approach to the MENA. This approach allows for analyzing all influences on the involved MENA states and the range and limitations of EU influence.

2.5 Chapter conclusion

From a CPE perspective, the promotion of regional integration can thus be understood as driven by the capitalist expansionary market mechanism in the interest of neoliberal European elites. Through consent and coercion, the EU, as an imperialist power, attempts to spread its norms and simultaneously legitimize its model vis-à-vis the traditional nation-state through the model's export. This legitimation is required to further build its power position within the global political economy, concerning both peripheries and its competitors. Restrictions to the EU regional promotion strategy can be explained by incorporating global competition dynamics and local agencies. The competition for market expansion of the EU with other global powers such as the US as well as new rising powers such as China limits the room for maneuvering of the EU and presents alternative strategies and models to partner states in the region (Smith, 2021; Hettne & Ponjaert, 2014). A further potential factor affecting the EU's strategy identified in CPE theory is the local agency of the actors involved in the Agadir Agreement and GAFTA, which also shape the outcomes. Thus, CPE provides a holistic theoretical framework that incorporates the interaction of the global, regional, and local scales in an explanatory approach for the differential EU regional economic integration promotion strategies.

Chapter 3 **Methodology**

One of the core strengths of the CPE theoretical framework is its critical method (Nixon, 2012). Therefore, this chapter will introduce the critical method used for the analysis of this thesis. It will especially emphasize the dialectical and relational elements of the critical method, which enables a holistic analysis of the regional economic integration strategies of the EU in the MENA embedded in regional and global developments. Based on this method, three hypotheses will be developed and operationalized using three indicators per hypothesis. Lastly, the data collection will be outlined.

3.1 The Critical Relational Dialectical Method

The critical method employed for this analysis can be defined as relational and dialectical and roots back to the works of Hegel and his philosophy of internal relations as well as consequent interpretations of this work by CPE scholars. A Hegelian dialectical method asserts the subjectivity of analysis and highlights the interrelation of thoughts and existence, constituting a real historical process. Critical scholars such as Marx and Gramsci took this understanding of dialectics and applied it more materialistically (Postone, 2003). One of the central elements of this critical dialectical understanding consists of a structure-agency perspective that defines current structures as the outcome of human action in the past. It thus allows for a perception of social structures and dynamics as changeable through human and social agency (Bieler, 2005; Nixon, 2012; Ryner, 2015). Thus, the method is inherently critical since social reality is defined as historical and hence alterable.

The method is relational, based on the idea that all elements of this transformable social reality are dialectically related, making up a social totality. The totality is formed as a consequence of operations by its components and does not formerly exist. However, the arising social totality cannot be limited to the mere action of its components but should be conceptualized as emerging and developing (Valadbaygi, 2021). The method, therefore, primarily investigates the relations between the components themselves as well as with the totality and examines the dynamics and changes in these relations over time (Hanieh, 2018). Consequently, to grasp the social reality of the EU differential regional economic integration promotion strategies, the relations between and with the components that define these promotion strategies must be examined (see Figure 1). As defined in the theoretical framework,

these components can be summarized as the EU capitalist needs, the global and regional power dynamics, and internal project dynamics. This approach makes it possible to step away from methodological nationalism (Hanieh, 2015) and grasp the mutually reinforcing limiting and enabling dynamics and interrelations on a global scale.

The essential tool of the employed critical relational dialectical method is the "power of abstraction" (Nixon, 2012, p. 446). To grasp the totality, it must be abstracted and thus must be broken down into components. The parts can consist of concepts, ideas, and different scales or timeframes. However, while frequently, the separate consideration of the parts leads to the veiling of totality, especially in the case of capitalist relations, the relations between the parts must also be taken into account to understand the complex totality (Postone, 2003). The abstractions employed for this analysis will be based on the developed method and hypotheses and will be outlined below.

3.2 Hypotheses

Rooted in the CPE theoretical framework and methodological approach adopted, the following three hypotheses were developed:

H1: The differential nature of the EU regional economic integration promotion strategies in the MENA is partially influenced by the EU's neoliberal economic development, the capitalist expansion of capital mechanisms, and neoliberal elite interests.

H2: The intra-regional integration promotion strategies of the EU are differential partially due to the relational interplay of competitive strategies and the economic influence of competing global powers in the MENA.

H3: The differential regional economic integration promotion strategies are partially impacted by the agency of the MENA partner states and, thus, their preferences and attitudes, as well as the potential for profits arising from the cooperation with the EU.

3.3 Operationalization

The mentioned hypotheses can be operationalized through the abstraction of scale and time and the development of partial indicators for each hypothesis that allow for their more concrete measurement. Consequently, the social totality making up the differential EU regional economic integration promotion strategies can be brought together in a relational and dialectical manner.

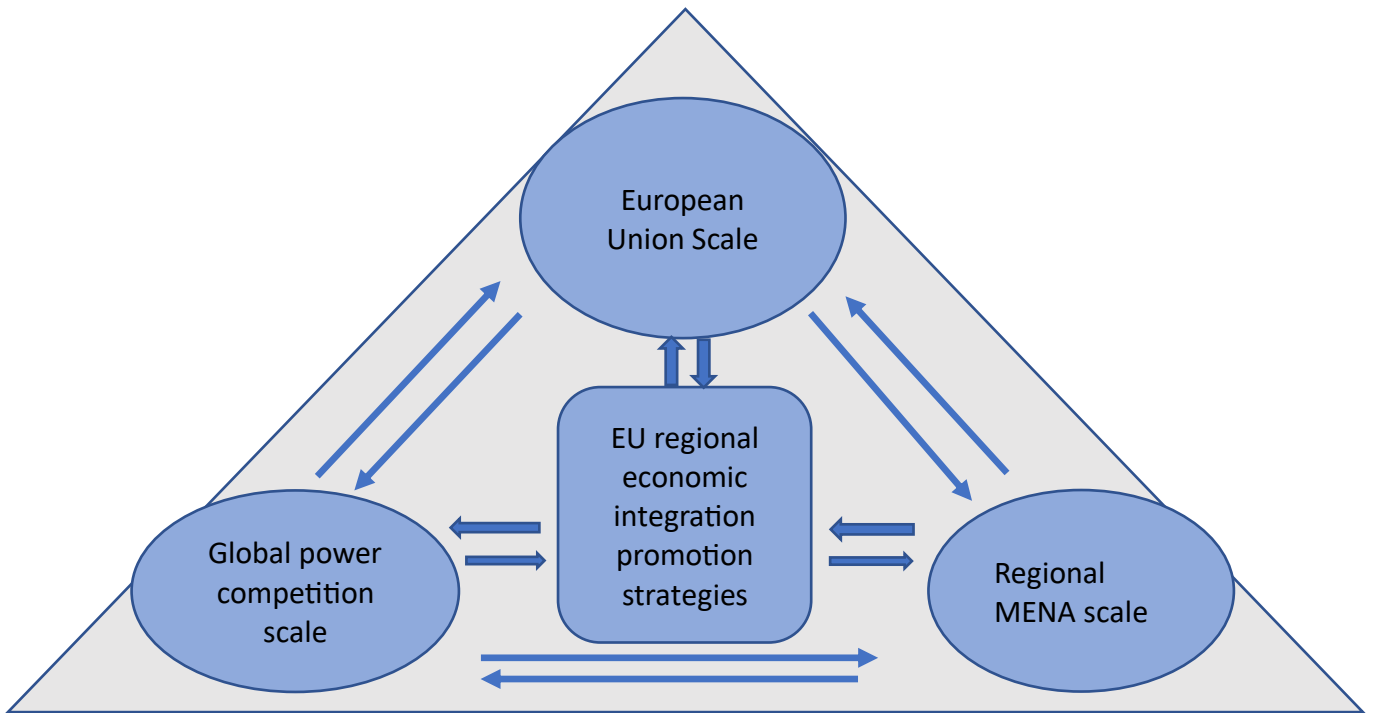
The developed abstraction of scale that guided the hypotheses development encompasses the EU scale, the global competition scale, and the regional MENA scale. The abstracted parts are viewed as internally related and thus as mutually influencing and influenced by each other while simultaneously being influenced and influencing the totality outcome of the EU differential regional integration promotion strategies (see Figure 1).

Further, an abstraction of time is required for an analysis that considers the historicity and transformability of structures. Therefore, the specified timeframes for the analysis were chosen to be abstracted in three components: the European Mediterranean Partnership from 1995-2003, the first part of the European Neighborhood Policy from 2004-2011, and the second part of the European Neighborhood Policy from 2012-2021 (see Figure 2). This abstraction is based on important changes in the EU MENA policy, of which the first one signified an increased focus on closer bilateral ties and an increased security emphasis which arose primarily out of an EU-initiated reform (Hanieh, 2013). Developments such as the Arab Spring, the Syria war, and the financial and euro crisis, which further drove the increased security and political stability emphasis and additionally fragmented and individualized the EU approach, brought about the second change identified in the 2011-2012 timeframe (Aboushady & Zaki, 2022).

To measure the hypotheses, indicators were developed based on CPE concepts and the critical relational dialectical method. The first hypothesis will be measured by a) the ideological discourse of the EU trade policy and MENA regional policy, b) the elite influence on EU trade and regional policymaking, and c) the economic development needs of the EU capitalist system. The second hypothesis will be measured by the three following indicators relating to the strategic competition dynamics in the MENA: a) the historical political-economic influence of competitors in the MENA in the 20th century, b) the current political-economic influence of the competitors in the MENA and c) competing trade and regional integration initiatives. To test the third hypothesis, the following three indicators related to regional MENA dynamics were established: a) the adoption of Western values, norms, and standards in the regional agreements, b) local population and MENA state preferences and attitudes, and c) the winning and losing dynamics of local actors from the EU promotion strategy.

Together, the indicators and abstractions form the experimental model of the relational dialectical analysis employed for this paper, guiding the following analysis. Notably, the abstractions and indicators should be viewed as tools to better understand the totality, which will be constructed based on the partial findings towards the end of the analysis.

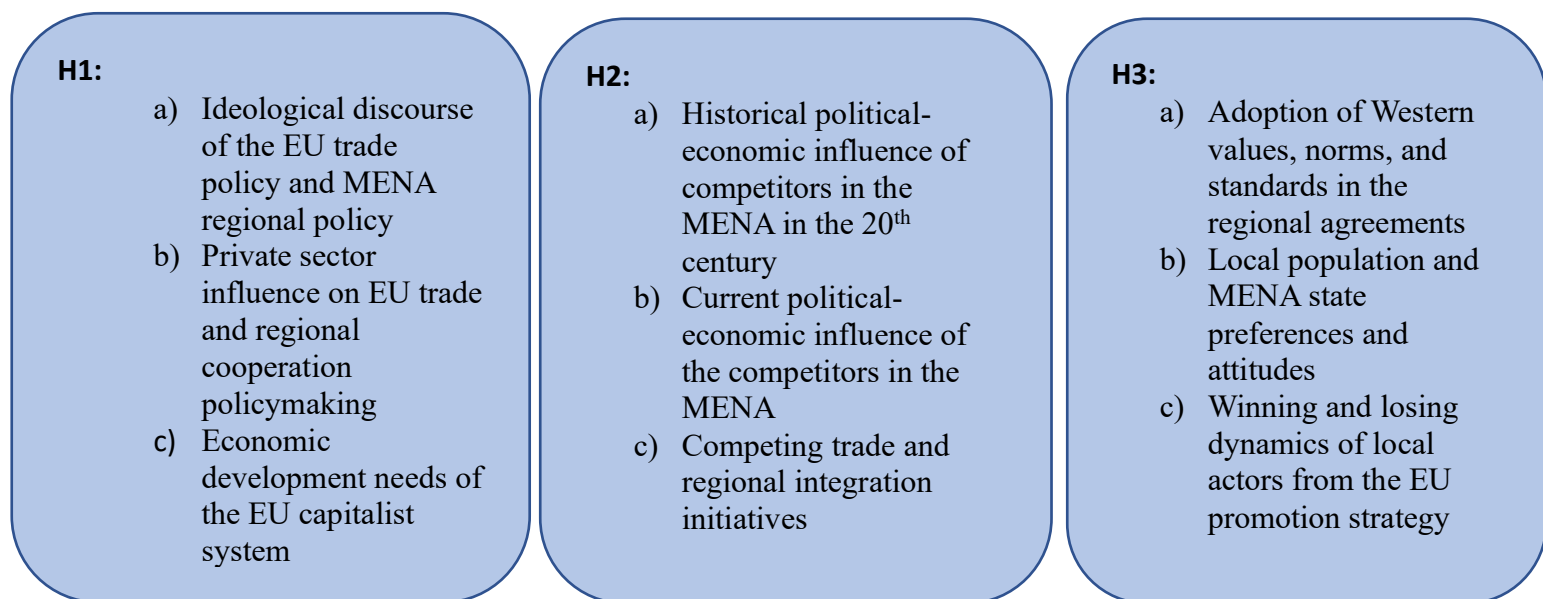
3.4 Experimental Model of the Critical Dialectical Relational Analysis



Graph 1: Relational abstraction of scale



Graph 2: Abstraction of time



Graph 3: Abstracted indicators of the hypotheses

3.5 Data collection

The research will use qualitative historical analysis of primary and secondary documents guided by the relational dialectic method and model. Empirical data on trade and investment flows within the MENA and with the global powers examined will further enrich it.

For the first hypothesis, EU documents provide valuable insights into why the EU employs differential regional economic integration promotion strategies. Thus, documents from 1995-2021 from the European Commission and European External Action Services (EEAS) databases will be analyzed. The timeframe was chosen given the start of the formal EU foreign and trade policy towards the MENA in 1995, the availability of necessary documents, and sufficient time passing for historical qualitative analysis since 2021. Additionally, trade and investment data of flows between the MENA and EU from databases of the European statistical office Eurostat, the World Bank, and the Observatory for Economic Complexity (OEC) will be used to strengthen the argument. For the second indicator, documents reporting on the negotiation process of the EMP and ENP, as well as material from the websites of key EU lobbying groups such as BusinessEurope, will be analyzed. Academic literature will be employed to provide a broader base for the analysis and identify the needed sources, especially for the third indicator analysis.

The first indicator of the second hypothesis research will be based on the findings in academic literature, historical agreements central to the region, such as the Sykes-Picot agreement, and statistical data from French colonies retrieved from the French Ministry of Finance and Economics database. The second and third indicators will primarily examine key MENA foreign policy documents of the competing global powers identified in academic literature. For US documents, government databases and, more specifically, presidential office documents and reports by the government accountability office will be analyzed. Chinese documents that will be investigated are releases by Xinhua, the government's official press agency, key foreign policy documents such as the China-Arab Policy paper, and documents published by the China-Arab State Cooperation Forum. The analysis of the Russian influence will be based on the Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation as well as the National Security Strategies. For a more detailed investigation of the economic influence in the region, further trade and investment data on the flows between the global competitors and MENA countries published by the World Bank and Statista will be examined.

The third hypothesis will rely more on secondary sources than the other two analytical chapters due to the language barrier and the limited availability of translations. However, the

first indicator analysis focuses on the examination of the translated policy documents of the Agadir and the GAFTA Agreements. The second indicator examination relies on the results of public opinion surveys such as the Arab Barometer and the World Values Survey in the 2000s and 2014. It further employs available primary sources of the regional organizations in focus, such as the Arab League Charter and scholarly literature. For the analysis of the third indicator, primarily academic literature is used, with the addition of EU documents from the DG Enterprise and Industry and OECD data to strengthen the argument empirically.

Chapter 4

The European Union Scale – Economic development needs, neoliberal discourse and elite influence on trade policymaking

The first of the three analytical chapters focuses on the EU scale and answers the first sub-question: How do EU economic and ideological dynamics and developments influence the EU regional economic integration promotion strategies in the MENA? Moreover, it tests the first hypothesis. The chapter will first examine key EU trade documents to identify and investigate the underlying ideological neoliberal discourse. Consequently, the ability of neoliberal elites to influence the EU trade and MENA regional policymaking will be analyzed. Lastly, the economic development needs of the EU from 1995-2021 will be investigated.

4.1 The ideological discourse of the EU trade and MENA regional policy

Examining the discourse used in the EU trade and MENA regional policy is central to understanding the drivers of the EU approach. This indicator analysis will focus on the neoliberal and imperialist language in the EU documents. Neoliberalism is of central importance since it has dominated international trade discourses since the mid-1990s, whereby the EU could be identified as one of the leading entities (De Ville & Orbie, 2013). The imperialist focus can be traced back to the colonial past and the continued normative approach with attached conditionalities adopted by the EU in the region (Joffe, 2016).

In the first observed timeframe from 1995-2004, based on the EMP, neoliberal and imperialist tendencies could be identified in the examined documents. The documents present the initiative and especially free trade as the only viable development path to gain economic growth (European Commission, 1994). Additionally, the need for economic reform and the adoption of the EU regulatory framework in terms of customs, competition law, free capital movements, ROO, and intellectual property rights are emphasized, showcasing the imperialist attempt at the imposition of neoliberal EU norms (European Commission, 1994; European Commission, 2002). Towards the end of the EMP, further weight is put on the conditionalities of EU assistance and deeper integration attached to the partner country's respect for the EMP normative principles of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and international law, again highlighting the dominance of EU values in the relationships (European Commission, 2002).

The importance of regional economic integration is highlighted, especially in the regional strategy paper, which outlined the 2002-2004 program for the MENA. The EU seems

to view South-South integration as an intermediate instrument that prepares the involved countries for integration with the EU and fosters economic development from which the EU can gain (European Commission, 2002). Interestingly, although regional and subregional integration is highlighted as the necessary central step for the MENA region, only the Agadir Agreement is mentioned as an important initiative that's closely supported by the EU, while the GAFTA initiative is not mentioned at all (European Commission, 2002). Therefore, based on these findings, the EU promotes closer regional economic integration among countries with which it wants closer relations and can influence the employed regulatory framework and norms in economic integration and trade relations.

In the first period of the ENP, which the EU promotes as an initiative that aids the spread of the advantages of the EU 2004 enlargement with its old and new neighboring countries, a change in the language can be observed. Two years after the regional strategy, the EU is now highlighting the "joint ownership", "shared values" and "common interests" and emphasizing that they would not impose any conditions on the partner countries (European Commission, 2004, p.8). However, the upholding of EU values to which the conditionalities formerly were attached remains a central theme in the ENP strategy paper. Further, the documents highlight the expectation of significant economic benefits from bringing the partners "closer to the EU economic model" (European Commission, 2004, p. 14). Thus, the attempt of the EU to export its economic model can be identified. The new focus on bilateral association agreements in the regional framework is justified by the expected efficiency gains through differentiated integration levels, showcasing the drive for the fastest feasible implementation of the neoliberal model in the EU external policy.

With the adjustment of the ENP to the 2006 Go Global strategy of the EU, which vastly widened the scope of the EU trade policy globally, the need for deeper integration, including issues such as business competitiveness and tax policy, is emphasized. Thus, the new policy documents highlight that the EU influence should reach beyond just mere free trade in goods and services (European Commission, 2006b). Most importantly, the renewed ENP included the work with the "neighbors of neighbors," thus extending the scope of the ENP (European Commission, 2006b). However, while one could expect a consequent mention of GAFTA and possible collaborations, only a possible partnership with the smaller group of states of the Gulf Cooperation Council is mentioned (European Commission, 2006b). Therefore, the focus remains on a smaller group of states that hold less power and, thus, are easier influenced by the EU.

In the third timeframe, less development in the policy for the region can be observed, and the focus is put on responses to significant global and regional events such as the Arab Spring and COVID-19. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the importance of democracy, human rights, and civil society involvement is increasingly highlighted and tied to an incentive-based approach (European Commission, 2012). Thus, it reflects the MENA developments and the increasingly negative global perception of conditionalities and represents a new approach that still allows for the inclusion of neoliberal and other EU values. In addition, the plans to establish deeper and more comprehensive free trade areas with the Agadir countries reflect the logic of the function of closer regional integration as preparation for closer integration with the EU. Although the scope of support for subregional integration projects was further widened to the Arab Maghreb Union with the member states of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia and on the political level even to the League of Arab states, the GAFTA economic scale of regional integration under the umbrella of the League of Arab states remained disregarded (European Commission, 2012).

Thus, all observed documents over the timeframes showcase the EU's commitment to the neoliberal model, its spread to the MENA, and the imperialist imposition of its normative values. Further, the indicator analysis revealed the EU conception of regional economic integration as a driver of economic growth and preparation for the consequent deeper integration with the EU.

4.2 Private sector influence on EU trade and regional cooperation policymaking

Since the analysis and former literature could establish that the EU economic ideology is largely neoliberal, the influence of dominant neoliberal actors, such as businesses, on the EU trade and regional policymaking should also be examined.

The increasing autonomy of the EU in trade policymaking that started primarily with the introduction of the qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers in the 1990s brought about a restructuring of the lobbying structures of firms to adjust to the new political realities (Coen, 1998). Consequently, particularly multinational firms built substantive capacities for multilevel lobbying and the building of new alliances as they perceived that they could most efficiently influence trade policy at the EU level (Coen, 1998). Thus, as also found by Dür (2008), it can be argued that the EU Commission is not a neutral entity that is not influenced by societal pressures. Instead, a complex two-way lobbying framework can be observed in the EU trade policymaking. On the one hand, the EU started seeking firms' input

for technical expertise and increased leverage in the negotiations with both third parties and member states through consultation with businesses (Woll, 2009). On the other hand, businesses needed to shift their political capacities from the member states to the EU level (Dür, 2008; Woll, 2009). Since the Commission does not have a direct accountability channel to the EU population, it can more selectively choose firms that offer pan-European solutions and offers that are more aligned with its own neoliberal economic beliefs. This is also supported by the evidence found by Drieghe et al. (2022), who established that non-business civil society groups that did not support the free trade neoliberal approach had less influence on trade policymaking.

Regarding the specific lobbying influence on the EMP and ENP, the BusinessEurope group, which is affiliated with over 3.8 Mio firms, and BusinessMed, an association of firms in the Mediterranean, could be identified as central. Their shared Athens Declaration from 2009 shows their strong support for the Agadir Agreement and deeper economic integration. Interestingly the language used and the aims expressed are closely aligned with the EU documents (BusinessEurope & BusinessMed, 2009). In 2012, BusinessEurope further lobbied for more direct support for business communities, which is also included in the closer and deeper agreements with the Agadir Agreement members negotiated at the time (De Buck, 2012; European Commission, 2012). These negotiations also seem to be of increased interest to BusinessEurope, given their close monitoring of the process on their website (BusinessEurope, n.d). Similarly, the European Roundtable of Industrialists (ERT) supported the closer integration aim of the ENP among the Agadir countries, as expressed in a series of position papers of the organization (ERT, 2004).

Additionally, the influence of some sectoral lobbying groups could be identified. Primarily the French and German car manufacturers were found to play a leading role. The European Automobile Manufacturers' Association, with members ranging from Volkswagen to Renault and Fiat, expressed that they would like "to have one huge market, without duties, without problems at customs" in the Agadir region (Reppert-Bismarck, 2011, para. 5). Renault has also individually lobbied for closer integration with and among the Agadir states given their plans to build a manufacturing plant in Morocco to exploit the cost advantage (Kilkelly, 2008). Importantly, powerful agricultural lobby groups support the measures implemented by the EU. Rising prices in the EU and privatization schemes in the Agadir states led to French and Spanish farmers' increased interest in expanding their operations and investing in North African farms ("A new national strategy for agriculture," 2008). For instance, by 2006, more than 10% of the Tunisian farms were owned by foreigners (FIPA, 2006). This represents an essential change

since before and in many other contexts; the agricultural lobby groups effectively blocked the closer integration and opening of the EU agricultural market to external markets.

Thus, this indicator analysis has shown that the private sector influence represents a central factor in the EU trade and regional policymaking. The increased focus of lobbyists on the EU level showcases the importance of including this indicator analysis. Key industrialist groups were found to strongly support the Agadir Agreement and showed specific interests in the Agadir member countries, given their economic interests.

4.3 Economic development needs of the EU capitalist system

Building on the findings of the first two indicators, the underlying economic needs of the EU, which drive the ideological discourse and private sector involvement, need to be understood. The global political and economic setting in the 1990s must be considered to grasp the EU's economic development needs and related economic interests. Confronted with the end of the Cold War and the finalization of the internal market process through the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, an increased external market orientation was necessitated (European Commission, 1992; King, 1993; Young, 2017). New market links with developing countries became more attractive since economic gains from integrating with developing countries provided larger gains given the cost-price differences (Hoekman, 1998). Combined with the urge of the EU to establish its regionalism model abroad and the stalling of further WTO multilateral trade progress starting in the Doha Round, an increased orientation to bilateral and regional arrangements could be observed (Poletti & Sicurelli, 2018; European Commission, 2006a).

Thereby, a shift could also be witnessed in the EU approach to market integration with developing countries, which transformed from unilateral market access for former colonies to increasingly reciprocal relations after the WTO ruled against the EU trade discrimination on historical colonial grounds (European Commission, 2002; Young, 2014). Hence, the neoliberal trade strategy in the EU's Southern neighborhood became increasingly driven by economic interests, especially after the significant EU enlargement at the start of the 2000s (Dür, 2008).

Notably, the trade flows between the Agadir Agreement countries and the EU doubled between 1994 and 2000 (Quefelec, 2001), while further increases in trade flows stalled with the enlarged scope of EU trade relations globally (Eurostat, 2020). One of the primary goods imported to the EU from the region was oil, making up 18.2% of the imports in 1995, with continued 1-3% of the crude oil EU imports coming from Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, which slightly increased after 2010 (OEC, n.d.). Similarly, 26% of the FDI invested in the region from

2003 to 2019 went to the mining and fuels sector (OECD, 2021). However, the increased demand for oil by the EU to replace the Syrian sources during the war was not able to be met by the country group, which is facing depleting oil sources and instead led to closer EU trade relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council group (External Action Services, 2021). The closer integration with the GCC group can also be linked to their central role in the petrochemical industry, a rapidly growing resource in high demand (Hanieh, 2021).

The increasing production costs in the EU's industrial, manufacturing, and agricultural sector is an additional central driver of EU economic interests in the Agadir region. The restructuring of the global economy toward a complex network of global value chains has led to the pursuit of potential outsourcing opportunities which offer lower labor and overall production costs combined with a well-established logistical structure (Khalili, 2021). Interestingly, the priorities set by the funding instrument of the ENP could be traced back to the geographical setting of the European car industry production sites such as Tangier in the Agadir states (EuropeAid, 2008). Combined with the opportunities offered by newly established special economic zones, especially in Jordan and Egypt, to gain tax benefits and access to well-established logistical infrastructure (Ziadah, 2018), the region thus offers substantial economic potential for the EU.

Regarding EU investments and imports from the area, textiles and clothing are another central product. During the 1980s and 1990s, especially Tunisia and Morocco were able to grow their textile sectors, quadrupling their export values. Many EU multinational corporations also used the protective WTO Multifiber Agreement (MFA) to outsource their production in the field to the Mediterranean countries to limit reliance on the dominating Asian textile industry, whereby the cheap labor availability provides a closer geographical alternative for the EU (Hoekman, 1998; Eurostat, 1995). Significant investments by European firms such as Benetton in Tunisia in 2005 or by the French, Italian, and Portuguese fashion businesses in the yarn spinning and weaving sector further underline this development (Pigato et al., 2010). Thus, as Luisa Santos from Euratex, the EU textile lobby, said, "The idea is that we use these countries as manufacturing hubs" (Reppert-Bismarck, 2011, para.21). This indicates that the MENA textile industry primarily produces lower-value products, which are then further used in the higher-value-added industries in the EU.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the increasing external orientation combined with the restructuring of the global economy into a net of global value chains impacted the EU promotion strategy. While the trade with the Southern Neighborhood for the EU only made up 4.6% of its overall trade as of 2020 (European Commission, 2020a), the region possesses key

inputs for future EU economic development needs. Thereby, the EU gains from the market access in the region needed for the EU businesses to upkeep internationally competitive prices, especially in the car and textile manufacturing industry.

4.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has investigated the European Union scale factors impacting the EU promotion strategy. Examining key EU EMP and ENP policy documents confirmed the EU's commitment to neoliberal development in its approach to the MENA. It showcased the imperialist imposition of the EU regulatory framework and its normative values. Additionally, the indicator analysis showed the EU's conception of regional economic integration as a driver of economic growth and as a preparation for deeper integration with the EU.

Further, the EU's economic beliefs and regional integration promotion strategy could also be linked to the influence of EU businesses. Firms most aligned with the EU's neoliberal economic beliefs extensively influenced the EU trade policymaking and the preferential support of the Agadir Agreement over other projects aligned with these European private sector interests. Lastly, the investigation of the EU's economic development needs and interests showed that historical events at the start of the 1990s led to the increased external and developing country orientation of the EU seeking new market opportunities. Considering the increased developments of global value chains and outsourcing, the MENA, and especially the Agadir countries, could be identified as central to the economic future of the EU. The potential gains can be summarized as the ability to seek cheap labor and other low-cost production inputs for EU industries such as the car and textile sectors. These benefits are especially central given the increased downward pressure on prices through international competition, which will be observed in the following analytical chapter.

Chapter 5

The Global Competition Scale – Historical and Current Economic Influence and Competition of Global Powers in the MENA

This chapter builds on understanding the MENA region as a locality of competition among global powers. Since the 19th century, the region has been impacted by competitive dynamics, starting with the contestation over trade routes between the British and the Russian empires (Wasser et al., 2022). Thus, the focus will be put on answering the following sub-question: How do global power dynamics in the MENA affect the EU regional promotion strategy? The hypothesis that the regional integration promotion strategies of the EU are differential partially due to the relational interplay with the economic influence of competing global powers in the MENA will be tested using the three developed indicators. First, the historical economic influence of competitors in the MENA will be examined, followed by the analysis of the competitors' economic influence in the set timeframe from 1995-2021. Lastly, competing initiatives for closer trade relations with Agadir and GAFTA project members will be investigated before a conclusion is drawn.

5.1. The Historical Political Economy Influence of Competitors in the MENA in the 20th century

The historical investigation of the political-economic influence of competing actors in the MENA in the 20th century primarily serves as a basis for understanding the current political-economic influences in the 21st century.

5.1.1 Colonial Powers

The colonial rules of France and Britain defined the MENA political economy at the start of the 20th century. Tensions between the British defense of a globalized free trade approach and the drive of weaker European powers such as France, Italy, and Germany to use a protectionist model to extend their preferential access to colonial economies could be found (Clarence-Smith, 1999). Thus, while British colonies remained more integrated into the global economy, French economies were increasingly defined by regional integration between themselves and the colonial power. The impact of the approach could also be felt far into the 20th century, with

only one-fourth of the French colonies' imports stemming from other foreign sources and trade among French colonies falling by 65% after independence (Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances, 1959; Lavallée & Lochard, 2012). The economic influence of the colonial rulers was further expanded through the secret division of former Ottoman territory between France and Britain in the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 (see details in Figure 4 below; Sykes-Picot Agreement, 1916). Thus, much of the area covered by the Southern Neighborhood of the EU today was under French and partially British rule. However, their sphere of influence also went beyond the scope of the current focus area of the EU. Thus, historical influence alone cannot explain the current EU strategy sufficiently.

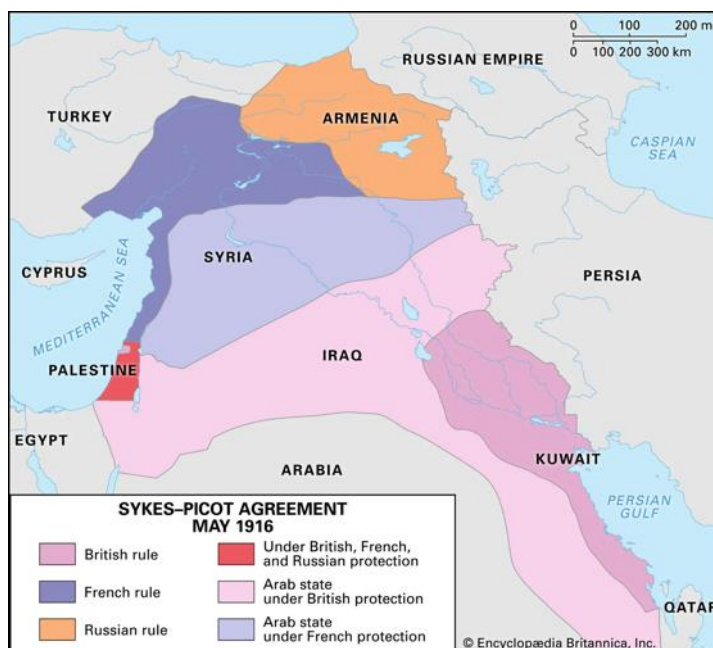


Figure 4: The Sykes-Picot Agreement outcomes, *Encyclopedia Britannica*

5.1.2 United States

The fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Great Depression, and World War II brought about a power shift from the former colonial powers to the United States and the Soviet Union (Clarence-Smith, 1999; Wasser et al., 2022). The MENA increasingly served as a central locality of the Global Cold War and was vastly impacted by the ideological, political, economic, and military competition between the US and the Soviet Union (Wasser et al., 2022). The US involvement can be specifically traced back to the shift from coal to oil in the world economy (Jones, 2012). Thereby, the US strategic priorities can be summarized as the safeguarding of the oil supplies and the general security of the Gulf region as expressed by President Carter in the State of

Union Address in 1980 as well as the protection of Israel (Alnasrawi, 1989; Marei, 1980; Carter, 1980). Additionally, the US enhanced its influence in the region through trade and investment flows which grew from a return of \$2 billion per annum after World War II to \$15 billion in 1978 (Marei, 1980). Thus, the economic and political interests converged, and the closest ties of the US with MENA countries could be observed with oil-rich countries such as Saudi Arabia and Israel (Jones, 2012). Except for Egypt, the focus point of the US at the time hence differed from the EU policy centers for the region today, indicating the relevance of historical competition dynamics with other actors for the EU strategy.

5.1.3 Soviet Union

The expansion of the Soviet MENA policy beyond the direct neighbors of Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan primarily took place in the 1950s. Discontent with the European imperial reign and the US support of Israel aided the establishment of close Soviet relations with Egypt and later Syria (Khalidi, 1985). Additionally, the Soviet Union established close ties with Iraq, Sudan, Algeria, and North Yemen. However, Soviet alliances can be defined as dynamic and shifting, especially with the drift of Egypt toward the Western alliance in the 1970s (Turner, 2012). While the Soviet Union is a proximate neighbor to the MENA, its power capabilities were always seen as subordinate to US influence. The lack of interest in the region's oil and the competition dynamics between Soviet and MENA oil can also explain these dynamics (Trenin, 2016). The examination of the Soviet historical analysis, therefore, shows a different focal point of Soviet foreign policy compared to the Western powers apart from Egypt, underlining the importance of historical ties and value overlap for shaping the regional integration landscape.

It must be noted that the historical narrative's full complexity goes beyond the scope of this thesis, and more detailed examinations can be found in other literature (see Ashton, 2007; Fichter, 2019; Gause, 2017; Lüthi, 2020; Owen, 2013). However, this indicator analysis revealed the historical shaping of regional integration structures by competing power influences. While at the start of the 20th century, the colonial logic molded sub-regional economic integration arrangements, structural changes led to a shift in competition structures. Consequently, the Cold War rivalry became the defining logic of closer regional cooperation and integration among allies. It, therefore, becomes clear that the competition dynamics in the region play a central role in forming regional integration strategies.

5.2 The Current Political Economy Influence of the Competitors in the MENA

In the observed timeframe, the MENA region remained a locality of strategic economic competition among global powers. As the main competitors of the EU, the US, China, and to a smaller extent, Russia could be identified (Wasser et al., 2022). All three mentioned powers showcased their strategic competition drive in their actions and statements. The Chinese People's Party repeatedly stated their perception of the Chinese position in constant competition with other great powers (Johnson, 2023); the United States included political, economic, and military strategic competition in their National Security Strategy in 2017 (Presidential Office, 2017) and Russia's 2015 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation outlined the same principles (Russian Federation President, 2015). This section will therefore investigate the political-economic influence of the US, China, and Russia in the MENA region, focusing on trade and investment flows.

5.2.1 The United States

The United States dominated the region in political and military terms in the 1990s. However, due to the 2003 Iraq invasion and the rise of new powers like China, the US lost its image as a security guarantor (Salman et al., 2015; Wasser et al., 2022). Regarding MENA export and import trade flows, the US share also significantly decreased. In 1995, 16.33% of the MENA exports went to the US, and the imports from the US made up the largest share of MENA imports, with 15.71% (World Bank, 1995). By 2008, the US only made up 4.82% of the MENA exports and 8.54% of the MENA imports (World Bank, 2008). In the following years, the numbers stabilized and only slightly decreased to 3.54% of the MENA exports going to the US and 8.24% of the MENA imports coming from the US in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). The increased role of China and the oil autarky of the US can explain this development. The main trade partners of the US remained largely the same as during the Cold War, with a focus on Gulf states and Israel.

On the other hand, the investment flows from the US to the MENA increased eightfold from 2000-2020, from \$10.86 billion to \$81.82 billion (Statista, 2020). The main receivers of the US investment were the closest allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia, as well as the UAE and, with significantly lower sums Egypt and Oman (World Bank, 2020). Therefore, mixed results about the US economic influence regarding trade flows and investments in the MENA could

be identified. Interestingly, only Egypt is economically dependent on both the US and the EU; however, the US qualifying industrial zone in Jordan also provides economic influence for the US (Wasser et al., 2022). This indicates a certain overlap of influence of the Western powers, whereby the US maintains a clear dominance in its main focus areas, limiting the EU's room for maneuver.

5.2.2 China

Chinese engagement in the MENA expanded significantly starting at the end of the 1990s. The expansion was also linked to the 1999 "Going out" policy of the Chinese government, which incentivized Chinese firms to become active abroad (Leverett & Bader, 2005; OCAO, 2011). The government took a further step in 2013 with the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which will be analyzed in the next section (Wasser et al., 2022). The MENA geographical position and its ability to provide energy security and weapon sale revenue for China can explain the central role of the MENA in the BRI (Salman et al., 2015; Xinhua, 2016). The Chinese anti-imperialist stance and its opposition to the imposition of conditionalities further aid China's political and economic position (Wasser et al., 2022).

While China maintains relations with all MENA states, Chinese expert Sun Degang identified four categories of partner states of China in the region (2019). States with comprehensive strategic partnerships and central roles in energy security or the BRI, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the UAE, are identified as pivotal states. Nodal states are the partners that provide the opportunity to gain access to other influential powers, such as Turkey to the EU and Israel to the US. Given its population size and increasing economic relations with China, Iraq could be defined as a key state. In contrast, stronghold states like Qatar, Oman, Jordan, and Kuwait are seen as less of a priority (Sun, 2019).

As mentioned, China also overtook the US and, in 2008, became the number one origin country of MENA countries' imports with a share of 8.8% (World Bank, 2008). In the following years, the share grew to 15.36%, and China also held a share of 4.03% in the MENA exports (World Bank, 2020). Oil trade with Saudi Arabia and Iran constitutes the leading share of the trade flows, making up half of China's oil imports, while goods trade is focused on the GCC countries. In terms of investments, 28.5% of the BRI investments until 2021 were done in the MENA region, whereby 46% of the Chinese investment went toward the energy sector, and in 2016 China also became the leading investor in the MENA (Arab Center Washington, 2021).

Interestingly, while many GAFTA countries have close relations with China, the Agadir Agreement countries impose high tariffs on imports from China (Brenton et al., 2010). Thus, the closer relations with the EU seem to be linked to the shielding from Chinese product imports. Further, the increasing Chinese influence represents a challenge to the EU's influence and ability to impose its regional integration strategies on a larger regional scale. This is the case since China provides an alternative model, often viewed as more beneficial by MENA governments. The limited overlapping of the territorial focus of China with the EU could also be found in the analysis of the Russian economic influence that follows.

5.2.3 *Russia*

After the end of the Cold War, Russia remained largely absent from the MENA and only slowly returned in the early 2000s. The Russian interests can be summarized as the seeking of recognition as a great power and economic profits from the Gulf state's investments in Russia and weapon sales (Wasser et al., 2022; Trenin, 2016). With mixed success, Russia attempted to establish increased multilateral diplomatic and economic ties with a strategic imperative to strengthen its position (Wasser, 2019). The 2000 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation highlights the need to stabilize the MENA and the region's importance for Russian economic interests especially linked to energy flows (President of the Russian Federation, 2000). Later versions of the foreign policy concept further highlight the priority of extended trade and investment activities in the MENA region (President of the Russian Federation, 2008).

However, while trade and investment flows are a priority for the Russian government, and it has increased its influence in industries such as the agricultural and oil and gas sectors, Russia is unable to compete with the trade and investment influence of the other global powers in the region as visible in the trade and investment data (Valadbaygi, 2023; World Bank, 2020). The key partners of Russia could also provide a partial explanation for the disregard of GAFTA by the EU. Russia focuses its relations on the GAFTA members Syria and Iraq as well as on Iran (President of the Russian Federation, 2008); thus, tensions with Russia could also transfer to tensions with Russia's partners. However, this factor should not be overestimated, given the limited role of Russia in the timeframe of the establishment of GAFTA.

The examination of the economic influence of the other global powers in the MENA has shown that strategic competition dynamics drive the economic actions in the region and affect the EU's room for maneuver. While the US continues to have a different focus point,

there is substantial overlap in the economic influence of the Western powers. China and, to a lesser degree Russia, in turn, are gaining substantial influence, representing a new challenge to the EU in the region. With its central geopolitical position at the Suez, only Egypt is under significant competition from the three powers EU, US, and China. This indicates that only extraordinary interests in a country justify direct competition with other powers. While the Agadir countries are largely already oriented to the EU and partially its US ally, the support and closer integration with the whole GAFTA would require facing less friendly competitors like China and Russia. Thus, smaller steps such as trade deals with the GCC provide a strategically possible step in the direction in the light of the power realities.

5.3. Competing Trade and Regional Integration Initiatives

To fully evaluate the competition dynamics in the MENA, the regional initiatives such as free trade agreements or other partnership initiatives of the competitors have to be examined. The focus will be put on the leading competitors: the US and China, given their more considerable relevance compared to Russian operations.

5.3.1 The United States

The US perspective on regional economic integration vastly differs from the EU's. The US focuses primarily on bilateral relations with a loosely added regional context (Hettne & Ponjaert, 2014). However, the government recognized the economic potential of economic gains from regional integration as part of the global market competition system. Former US diplomat Patterson thereby emphasized the central role of regional integration in the economic liberalization of economies in the MENA, thus showcasing neoliberal rhetoric like the EU (2022). This understanding of regional integration serves as a basis for understanding the 2002 Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), linked to the plans for a US-Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) by 2013.

The MEPI is aimed at building partnerships with non-governmental Arab groups and civil society to promote democracy, civil society participation, education as well as economic reform with an emphasis on the private sector and the regional business climate (Presidential Office, 2002). This new initiative shifted the focus from regional stability promotion through military and economic programs focusing on Egypt, Israel, and Jordan to other MENA

countries (United States GAO, 2005). A map of the operations of the MEPI can be found below (Figure 5).

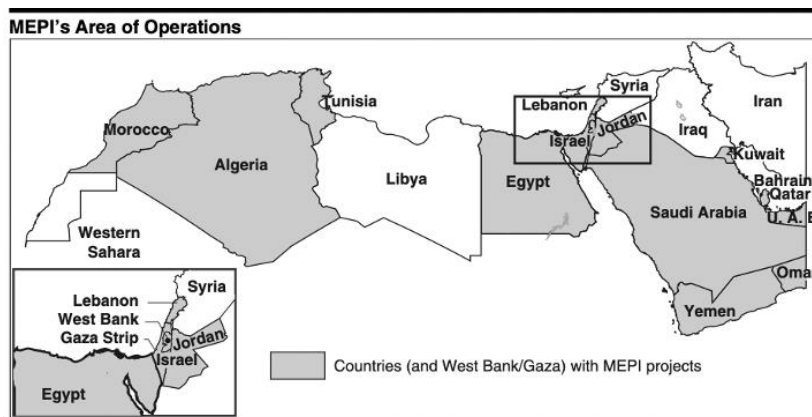


Figure 5: The operations of the MEPI, Presidential Office

The spending patterns of the MEPI suggest an increasing shift of the MEPI focus from the more contested area of democracy promotion and civil society integration to economic development and reforms in cooperation with Arab state actors (United States GAO, 2005). The shifted focus also aligns with the plans for the MEFTA, aimed at deepening trade and investment relations with the US to form a regional free trade area by 2013, announced in 2003 (Presidential Office, 2004). The speech of US trade representative Robert Zoellick at the 2003 World Economic Forum in Jordan revealed the strong neoliberal ideological basis of the project. He argued that the economic problems of the region stem from "closed national borders, centralized economic controls, the heavy hand of government, and nationalized industry" (Zoellick, 2003, para.7). Thus, he argued that the MEFTA would solve the mentioned issues and provide economic prosperity to the region through liberalization with a focus on openness to foreign capital within the MENA economic area (Zoellick, 2003).

These beliefs are also reflected in the four different diplomatic tools employed by the US in the context of MEFTA:

1. The support for the WTO accession of states such as Lebanon, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.
2. Trade and investment framework agreements (TIFAs) serve as dialogue and preparation tools for completing free trade agreements. TIFAs were concluded with Bahrain, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, the UAE, and Qatar (Presidential Office, 2004).

3. Free Trade Agreements were concluded with Jordan, Israel, Morocco, Bahrein, and Oman.

4. Qualified Industrial Zones in Egypt and Jordan provide unrestricted US market access for textiles with Israeli content (The Washington Institute, 2003).

While the MEFTA is not yet in place and further developments have stalled, the initiative can be interpreted as central to the development of the EU strategy and especially the ENP initiative. Given the timing, the ENP can be viewed as a response to MEPI, which was perceived as a challenger of the Barcelona process. Especially the increasingly bilateral focus and differentiation in the integration instruments are visible in both the US and EU strategies, indicating dynamics of relational influence between the Western MENA strategies.

5.3.2 *China*

China pursues a different strategy and focuses less on formal alliances or preferential agreements and more on good diplomatic relations with all countries in the region to avoid biased appearances in regional disputes (Wasser et al., 2022). However, China particularly emphasizes its relations with the Arab countries as part of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, which was set up in 2004 in cooperation with the Arab League (China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, 2020). The forum primarily serves as a dialogue tool to deepen cooperation in various areas (Xinhua, 2016). In the following years, the Chinese government repeatedly called for the cooperation to be strengthened through even closer cooperation, such as in 2010 when the strategic cooperative relations of comprehensive cooperation and common development were established (Jiechi, 2012).

Further, the language used for integration attempts is chosen carefully and is always linked to the sovereignty and the mutual benefit principles. In terms of regional integration, China thus closely supports the efforts of the Arab League and hence GAFTA. It further highlights the work of the GCC but does not impose its own concepts of regionality (Xinhua, 2016). Notably, the language used in China's Arab policy papers differs vastly from its Western competitors. The policy paper emphasizes the shared anti-imperialist stance, the treatment as equals, and the need for cultural exchange (Jiechi, 2012). Further, the language used for integration attempts is chosen carefully and is always linked to the sovereignty and the mutual benefit principles. These findings support the strategic competition challenge of China regarding the GAFTA project, limiting the EU's influence on the project members.

The BRI, China’s global initiative, to a certain degree, impacts regional integration patterns through its focus areas. A map of the BRI, which aims to establish the necessary infrastructure for closer global political and economic links to China, can be found below (see Figure 6). As visible in the map, the MENA is central to both the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative of China and has received substantial attention, especially since the first Chinese Arab Policy Paper in 2016. As part of the BRI, China started strengthening its relationships with geopolitically central states such as Egypt, the UAE, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran and has gained substantial regional influence (Sharma, 2019). Further information examining the immense complexities of the projects can be found in academic literature focused on the BRI and the MENA (see, for instance, Sharma, 2019; Hoh, 2019 and Eshteshami & Horesh, 2017).

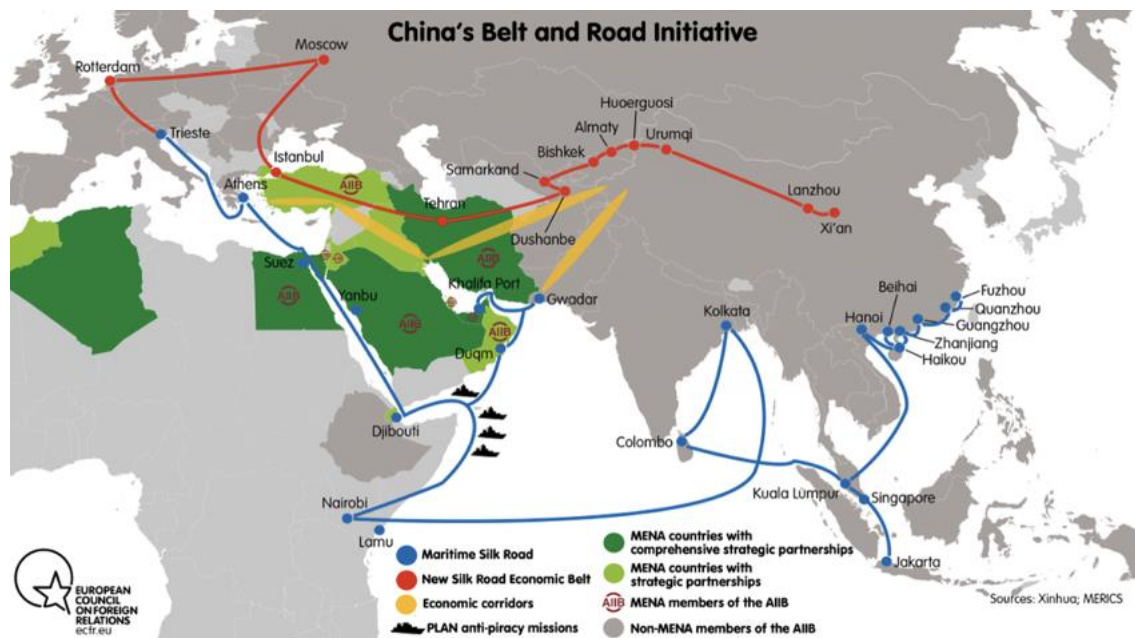


Figure 6: The Belt and Road Initiative, European Council of Foreign Relations

Conclusively, the start of the 2000s represented a crucial time for the competitive strategies of the global powers in the MENA. Within two years, the US started the MEPI, the EU the ENP, and China the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum. Further, substantial territorial overlaps of the Western initiatives and, to a limited degree, the Chinese BRI in Egypt could be found. However, a clear difference in the focus of China on the Arab League could be identified, providing a potential partial explanation for the hesitation of the EU to support the Arab League GAFTA initiative.

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

The investigation of the effect of the global power dynamics in the MENA on the EU regional promotion strategy has provided important insights into the shaping of EU policymaking by the strategic competition strategies of the United States, China, and to a limited degree, also Russia. Historically, the colonial logic formed sub-regional economic integration arrangements, which were replaced by the integration among the Global Cold War lines. The examination of the economic influence and the competing initiatives of global powers in the observed timeframe has shown that the strategic competition dynamics drive economic actions in the region and limit the EU's room for maneuver. This is especially visible in the race to establish new initiatives for the MENA at the start of the 21st century. While the Agadir countries are primarily already oriented toward the EU and partially its US ally, the support and closer integration with the whole GAFTA would require facing less friendly competitors like China and Russia, which have closer relations with the Arab League and its members. Thus, smaller steps such as trade deals with the GCC provide a strategically possible step in expanding EU-MENA relations.

Chapter 6

The MENA Regional Scale– Value and Norm Adoption, Attitudes and Winning and Losing Dynamics of Actors

To gain a holistic understanding of the EU regional economic integration strategy, it is essential to consider the agency, preferences, and dynamics in the MENA partner states. It provides additional insights and avoids the construction of the MENA states and populations as passive objects of the EU's and other global powers' needs and strategies. This third analytical chapter, therefore, poses the following sub-question: How do the regional MENA preferences and economic dynamics enable or limit the EU intra-regional promotion strategy? The chapter will test the hypothesis that the differing preferences and the potential for profits for certain groups in the MENA partner states partially impact the EU's differential regional economic integration strategies. The first indicator will look at the degree of the adoption of European values, norms, and standards in the Agadir and GAFTA Agreements. The second indicator focuses on the MENA partners' public opinion and state preferences and attitudes. Lastly, the winning and losing dynamics from the closer EU relations and the EU promotion strategies for different groups in the partner states will be investigated before concluding.

6.1. The Adoption of European Values, Norms, and Standards in the Agreements

Analyzing this first indicator enables a better understanding of the balance between the agency of the partner states and the EU influence through the analysis of the Agadir Agreement and GAFTA policy texts. The agreement content further provides an additional partial explanation for the preference of the EU for the Agadir over the GAFTA Agreement.

6.1.1 The Agadir Agreement

The Agadir Agreement text early on already mentions that the agreement should be set up “in harmony with the nature of modern economic ideologies on the national and regional fronts, and all the procedures that they may require” (Agadir Agreement, 2004, para.4). This showcases the commitment of the partner states to the adoption of the “modern” neoliberal economic model as well as the increasingly central model of regionalism which are constructed in contrast to the traditional state focused and economically closed MENA model. It highlights the willingness to potentially adopt large-scale reforms to achieve the implementation of the

economic model. In later passages, the agreement repeatedly mentions the need for the "attraction to foreign investment" and the increased "development of commercial trade relations and free trade" (Agadir Agreement, 2004, para. 6).

Additionally, the Agadir Agreement highlights the adoption of Western norms, such as the protection of intellectual property rights, which played a central role in the timeframe of China's main economic development. Moreover, adherence to the Pan-European Protocol and, thus, the EU-developed ROOs play an important role (Agadir Agreement, 2004; European Commission, 2010). It highlights the extent to which the EU could influence the rules adopted by its closer MENA partners; also in agreements the EU is officially not included in. Similar outcomes can also be found in the industry and agricultural standard setting. Thereby, the Agadir countries signed the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance (ACAA) of industrial products as well as agreed to Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) controls in the agricultural sector to enhance trade also with the EU countries (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2013; Cadot et al., 2012). Through the ENP and the promotion of the Agadir Agreement, the EU is thus able to largely influence the regulatory standards of the affiliated MENA countries and align them with their own rules and standards (Kourtelis, 2015). On the one hand, this lowers the technical trade barriers for trade with the EU. On the other hand, it increases the barriers to trade with competitors such as the US since adopting different rules and standards is often too expensive for the partner states.

Lastly, it is essential to mention that the direct cooperation agreements with the EU are ruling over the Agadir Agreement outcomes, which underlines the prioritization of trade with the EU over regional trade integration. Further, while the Agadir Agreement showcases significant overlaps with EU ideology, norms, and standards, it refrains from mentioning any political conditionalities or ideas of, for instance, democracy or civil society participation, which can be found in the EU policies for the MENA. Hence, a clear priority setting for economic development by the partner states can be identified.

6.1.2 Greater Arab Free Trade Area Agreement

The language adopted in the GAFTA agreement differs vastly from the Agadir Agreement. This is especially visible in statements about the goal of the agreement such as: "establishing a pan-Arab Free Trade Area that keeps pace with the conditions and needs of all Arab States" (Economic and Social Council, 1997, para. 3). The emphasis is put on the needs of the Arab states themselves and not the achieving of a certain model at any cost. The Arab identity of the

agreement and the Arab nature of the traded goods is also repeatedly highlighted, whereby a close connection between Arab unity and economic integration is established.

Regarding trade norms and standards, the agreement adopts its own rules of origin developed by the Economic and Social Council of the Arab League. Additionally, the agreement allows for special treatment of less developed countries and repeatedly highlights the need for shared benefits and burden sharing of consequences of establishing GAFTA (Economic and Social Council, 1997). Thus, it differs from the language adopted in the Agadir Agreement, which requires reciprocal action and accepts potential losses for some parties for the establishment of the agreement.

Lastly, the GAFTA agreement indicates the aversion to external meddling and influences in the economic ongoings of the member states. Firstly, it only allows other Arab states to gain more beneficial market access than agreed upon in the setting of GAFTA. Additionally, Iraq was able to gain an exemption from the part of the agreement, which highlights the adherence to World Trade Organization standards which Arab League states agreed to formerly. Iraq highlights the need to implement national or Arab conventions over international rules in terms of technical standards, safeguard measures, and subsidies (Economic and Social Council, 1997).

Conclusively, this analysis showed that EU ideals, norms, and standards largely influence the Agadir Agreement, which allows the EU to largely influence the trade environment of the member states in the economic but not necessarily the political sphere. In contrast, the GAFTA states focused mainly on Arab needs and their shared identity, which is also reflected in the adopted norms and standards. Thus, the EU promotion strategy seems to be linked to the ability of the EU to influence the norm and standard setting of the regional integration project, which was successful in the case of the Agadir Agreement but is frowned upon in the language employed by the GAFTA agreement.

6.2. Local Population and MENA State Preferences and Attitudes

The findings of the first indicator analysis provide an important basis for the further examination of the more general preferences and attitudes of the local populations and MENA states. The following analysis will focus on understanding the roots of the different attitudes reflected in the agreements.

6.2.1 Public Opinion

The public preferences examined in this section are based on the Arab Barometer results from the 2000s and 2014 and the World Values Survey. The results of the 2000s survey show that the MENA populations emphasize socio-economic rights and economic development over democracy (Teti et al., 2019). The outcomes of the 2014 Arab Barometer, which surveyed the Agadir countries and Libya and Iraq, also reflect these findings, thus allowing careful comparisons between Agadir Agreement populations and other GAFTA members. The inclusion of Iraq is especially interesting, given their opposition to external meddling in the GAFTA agreement.

Regarding public opinion on the influence of the EU in their respective countries, a clear focus on the possible positive effect of economic development provision by the EU can be observed. Especially in Tunisia, this opinion is widespread (64.1%), followed by Jordan at 48.8%, Morocco at 45.1%, and Libya at 40.00%. Interestingly the Iraqi population views the promotion of economic development by the EU slightly more favorably (31.2%) than the Egyptian population (30.8%) (Teti et al., 2017). On the one hand, these findings can be explained by lower Egyptian response rates and, on the other hand, by the high level of external competition dynamics within Egypt. The second highest cumulative rating for a positive role of the EU in the region is non-involvement, ahead of the promotion of democracy, involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the promotion of women's rights (see Figure 7). Especially when comparing the same answers for the US (see Figure 8), it becomes clear that the EU seems to be viewed more favorably, especially in its function as a promoter of economic development (Teti et al., 2017). This is the case for both Agadir and non-Agadir member states, and the differences between the Agadir states are equally sized to the differences with non-Agadir states, which indicates that the EU influence did not extensively reach local populations yet. It also suggests that the focus on economic measures and the leaving out of political ideals in the Agadir Agreement does reflect public opinions.

Examining the comparative attitudes toward the global powers competing in the region, differing public attitudes regarding their influence on regional stability can be observed. While the Egyptian and Iraqi populations viewed Russia and China as most favorable for regional stability and the Western powers as inducing instability, the opposite attitudes could be observed in Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia, which viewed the EU and, secondly, the US most positively. On the other hand, Jordan did not portray clear-cut preferences between the US, EU, and China. However, it viewed Russia as a negative factor for regional instability (see Figure

9, Teti et al., 2017). Thus, while current influences can partially explain the population preferences, they do not provide a clear-cut explanation for the differing EU strategy, which preferentially includes Egypt but not Libya in the regional integration mechanism.

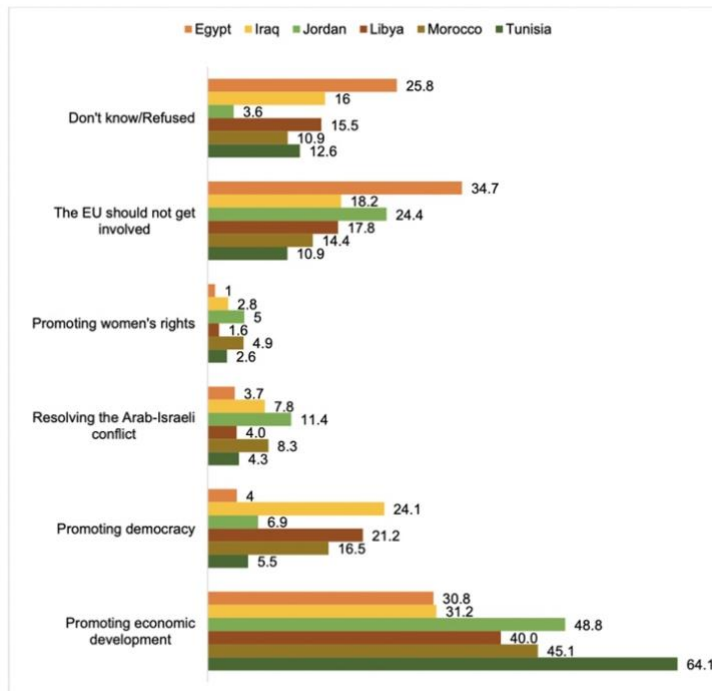


Figure 7: Most positive policy the EU could pursue in the respective country (Teti et al., 2019).

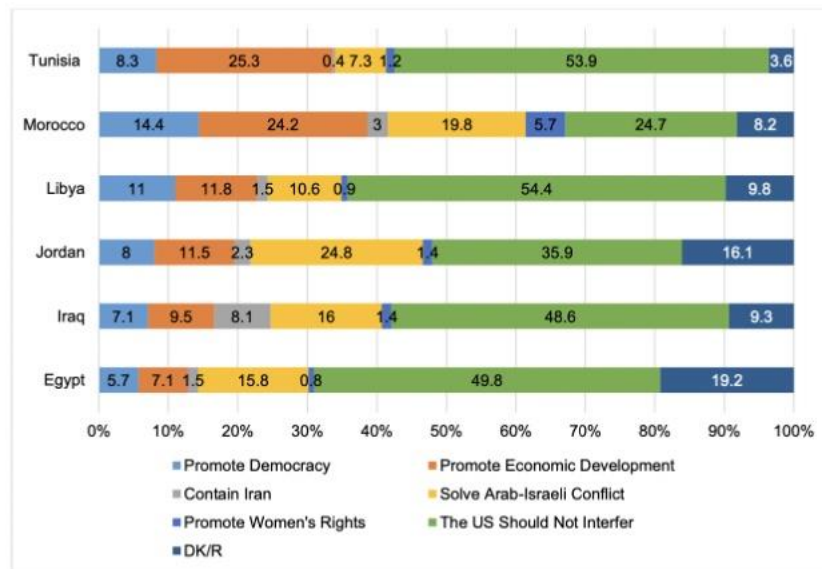


Figure 8: Most positive policy the US could pursue in the respective country (Teti et al., 2019).

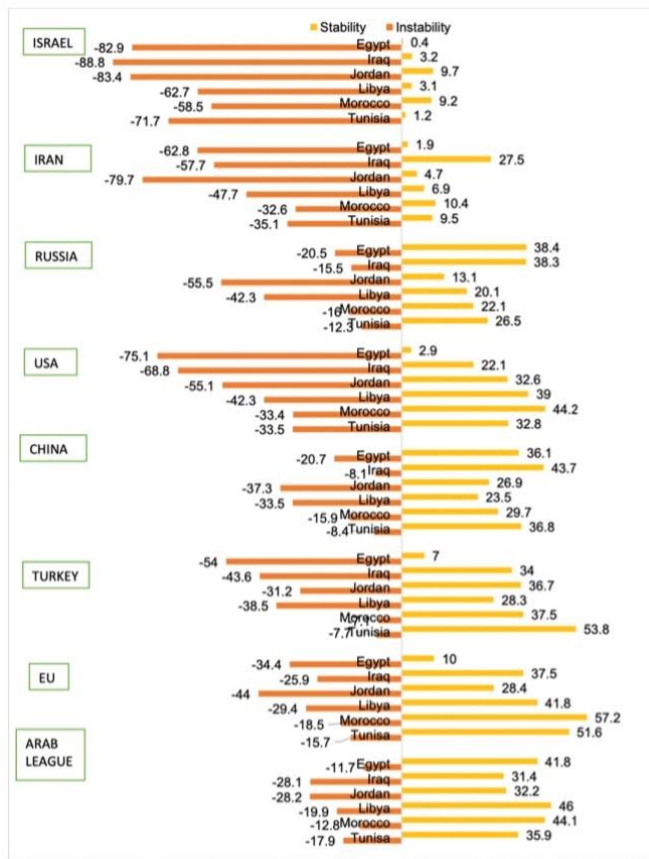


Figure 9: Perception of global and regional leaders as causing stability or instability (Teti et al., 2019).

6.2.2 Regionalism Roots and State Elites' Preferences

Additionally, the state and state elites' preferences and roots must be observed to understand the MENA preferences and attitudes better. If the EU wanted to promote the GAFTA agreement like the Agadir integration, closer cooperation with the Arab League would be needed. The highly intergovernmental regional organization was founded in 1945, right at the end of World War II and the gained independence of many states. However, the establishment of the organization can be primarily brought back to the shared drive for sovereignty and regime survival rather than for closer (economic) integration to upkeep peace, as in the case of the EU (Acharya, 2016). Barnett & Solingen (2007) argued that the rulers of the member states had to balance their own regime survival and state interests with the drive for Pan-Arabism, which could often be contradictory. Most heads of state thus chose the pathway of public support of Pan-Arab ideas but practical opposition to closer integration based on the principle of respect for independence, sovereignty, and regional stability outlined in the Arab League Charter (League of Arab States, 1945). Competitive dynamics for leadership within the organization

further reinforced these dynamics (Barnett & Solingen, 2007). Thus, the regionalism aims underlying the governing organization of GAFTA fundamentally differ from the EU aims, making closer cooperation difficult.

In contrast, the development of subregional groupings such as the Agadir group and the GCC, which are supported and promoted by the EU strategy, occurred in a very different setting from the 1980s to the 2000s. The groupings formed in a drive to enhance the standing of the MENA in the global economy and to attract foreign investment – aims that align more closely with the EU goals. Regarding the Agadir countries, the states were among the first to opt for reforms transforming the economy towards an open, liberal economic model, except for Egypt, which only started in 1991 (Barnett & Solingen, 2007). The economic drive also allowed for the acceptance of the EU discourse of democracy promotion, which could be aligned with the goal of the heightened legitimacy of monarchic or autocratic regimes. For instance, King Abdullah II of Jordan said after the 2016 parliamentary elections that the elections "deepened (their) democratic path" (Williamson, 2021, p.1483). A state official further claimed that "if you want people to trust the system, they want to know things [with elections] are fair and square" (Williamson, 2021, p. 1483).

Thus, the analysis of the public and private preferences and attitudes revealed the clear preference of the examined MENA public opinion for a limited role of the EU in economic development without including political aims with mixed preferences for the competing global powers. Thereby, no clear differences between Agadir and non-Agadir member populations could be observed, with significant similarities in Egyptian and Iraqi public opinion and similar attitudes of the Libyan population to the other Agadir members. Further, state and state elites' approaches and attitudes linked with the conception of regionalism employed in forming the different agreements could be identified as central factors for closer cooperation with the EU in the regionalism projects. While sovereignty demands drove the Arab League's regionalism, economic aims guided the Agadir and GCC integration, closely aligning them with the EU goals.

6.3. Winning and Losing Dynamics of Local Actors from the EU Promotion Strategy

Many scholars investigated the important role of states in the economy of the Agadir countries (Abbott & Snidal, 2000; Owen, 2004; Sayan, 2011). Consequently, business elites have a close connection and dependence on the regime leaders, especially in international trade. Individualistic lobbying has also been found to influence trade policies more effectively than

collective lobbying. These dynamics indicate a beneficial position of larger companies with closer relations to the political leaders (Kourtelis, 2015). In the following analysis of the consequences of the ENP policies and the Agadir Agreement in the agricultural and textile industry, it becomes apparent that elites close to the state benefitted the most. This provides an additional explanation for the closer cooperation of the Agadir states with the EU.

The agricultural sector presents a vital sector for the MENA region, with, for instance, 40% of the Moroccan and 30% of the Egyptian working population employed in the sector (OECD, 2011). Partner governments introduced large-scale reforms as part of the ENP and the Agadir Agreement. For example, in Tunisia, the agricultural sector was liberalized in 2004 without the simultaneous introduction of support measures for the farmers confronted with increased competition and the consequent driving down of prices. The low prices were an included aim of the Tunisian government as a tool to regulate inflation to reach this set priority of the ENP (Kourtelis, 2015). Simultaneously, the liberalization also led to rising land prices (Jouili, 2009). Combined, the measures harmed the small farmers selling products predominantly locally and benefitted the larger exporting farmers who were closely affiliated with the state elites (Jouili, 2009). Similar outcomes could also be observed in the other Agadir countries. In Morocco, for instance, the privatization programs and tax policies benefited not only the large farmers but also the foreign farmers, primarily from Spain and France, who could invest in the farms and acquire land (Kourtelis, 2015).

Similar benefits from the closer integration and cooperation with the EU for state elites could also be observed in the industrial sector. The signing of the ACAA agreement mentioned in the first indicator analysis linked the standard setting of the region with the EU standard setting. While until 2008, states set the standards in this framework, the "new approach" introduced by the EU changed these dynamics. It ascribed the responsibility and autonomy of industry-standard setting to the EU industries (DG Enterprise and Industry, 2012). This did not only increase the dominance of the EU businesses but also led to very high costs of compliance for MENA firms. Thus, only large Agadir enterprises were able to comply and thus were able to gain increased profit through the outcompeting of smaller and middle-sized firms (Kourtelis, 2015). This underlines the finding of the profiting of state elites from the EU policies. The profits consequently make them more likely to view the EU influence and promotion strategies positively.

The textile and clothing industry provides a more specific industrial example. The signing of the Agadir Agreement and the ENP happened shortly before the end of the multi-fiber agreement in 2005, which protected the MENA sector from the competition of cheaper

Asian producers. The US and EU markets provide the largest export markets for the sector, holding 50% of the world's import market share of textile and clothing. Especially for Morocco and Tunisia, EU exports are crucial, making up 95% of their export market. Egypt exports around 38% of its textile and clothing to the EU and 40% to the US, while Jordan exports 93% to the US (Pigato et al., 2010). Thus, especially for Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt, the EU market is crucial for the survival of the industry sector. However, the EU market had become more competitive, increasing the incentives for trade agreements with the EU and adopting EU standards that would allow the industry continued preferential access to the EU market and attract EU investments. While there are mixed results and overall losses of EU market share by the MENA countries, these losses were found to have been smaller than expected without the ENP partner agreements and the Agadir Agreement adoption of the EU standards (Pigato et al., 2010).

Thus, the state elites could profit from shifts in the agricultural and industrial policies induced by the EU's closer cooperation and promotion strategies. The profits of especially large farms and enterprises from consequent reforms incentivize the partner states to partner with the EU. While it goes beyond the scope of this thesis to examine economic developments across the whole GAFTA group in detail, the different economic structures and standards in place and the significant competition by other powers, such as China, indicate the absence of similar incentives for state elites in other MENA countries. Therefore, the winning and losing dynamics for the local state elites provide an important explanatory factor for the EU regional integration promotion strategies.

6.4 Chapter conclusion

Conclusively, the MENA regional scale analysis provided important additional insights for the holistic understanding of the enabling and limiting factors of the EU economic integration strategy for the MENA. The analysis of the Agadir and GAFTA Agreement texts confirmed the significant influence of the EU economic ideology, norms, and standards on the Agadir Agreement, which contrasts the GAFTA agreement's focus on the shared Arab identity as a mechanism against external intervention. However, the absence of political ideology in the agreement also revealed the agency of the Agadir partner states. The examined public opinion surveys also reflect the acceptance of the EU's economic but not political involvement in the region. Further, state leaders' attitudes and, specifically, the regionalism conceptions employed to establish the different regional arrangements could explain the outcomes present in the

agreement texts. While sovereignty demands drove the Arab League's regionalism, economic goals guided the Agadir and GCC aims, aligning them closely with the EU objectives. Hence, the EU strategy could be found to be aligned with the ability of the EU to influence the norm and standard setting of the regional integration project, which was successful in the case of the Agadir Agreement but is frowned upon in the language employed by the GAFTA agreement.

Further, the winning and losing dynamics from the closer cooperation and integration promoted by the EU play a crucial role. The reforms implemented in the agricultural and industrial sectors enabled profits for large enterprises affiliated with the state leaders and thus provided an incentive to cooperate with the EU. Similarly, the ability to upkeep preferential access to the EU market for the textile and clothing sector after the end of the multi-fiber agreement presented an incentive for the Agadir states. This incentive is not present in the GAFTA states with more access to EU competitor markets or more domestically oriented economies. Thus, the preferences, conceptions, and incentives of especially the local state elites were found to be central explanatory factors for the differential EU economic integration promotion strategy.

Conclusion

Conclusively, this thesis has investigated the research question: *Why is the EU employing differential regional economic integration promotion strategies in the MENA?* It has achieved a better understanding of the puzzling fragmented and differentiated strategy which favors sub-regional economic integration, as in the case of the Agadir Agreement over the geographically more comprehensive regional MENA economic integration GAFTA project. By employing a critical political economy framework and a critical relational dialectical method, the disconnect between the project-specific literature and the critical political economy literature that considers wider regional and global dynamics could be bridged. The abstraction of totality on three scales: the EU scale, the global competition scale, and the MENA regional scale enabled the dynamic understanding of the totality of the EU regional economic integration promotion strategy in the MENA.

The findings supported the argument that the relational interplay of all three of the investigated scales influences the EU's promotion strategy. On the EU scale, the capitalist expansion mechanism accelerated by the neoliberal drive in the 1990s led to the EU's imperialist external expansion of their regionalist economic model to the MENA. The analysis additionally showed that the EU conceptualizes regional economic integration as a driver of economic growth and as preparation for the consequent deeper integration with the EU. Simultaneously, the imperialist expansion of the regionalism model legitimized the EU model and its role as a global actor. The restructuring of the global political economy towards a network of global value chains further necessitated outsourcing activities in critical sectors such as the automobile and textile industry to upkeep competitive prices. Paired with the logistical infrastructure constructed in the MENA, the region thus possesses considerable economic potential needed for the future economic development of the EU. The membership size of the Agadir Agreement and the former ties with the member states provide the necessary conditions to enable a powerful position of the EU in trade relations which permits the influence on the employed regulatory framework. These findings can also be linked to the economic theory-focused literature investigated, which focused on the ability of the EU to influence the conditions set in the hub-and-spoke system-like structure of the ENP as outlined by, for instance, Zorob (2018).

However, the strategic global competition dynamics limited the ability of the EU to fully exploit the identified economic potential by adopting a broader MENA regional economic

integration promotion strategy. The intense competition becomes especially visible in the race to establish new MENA initiatives at the start of the 21st century with the EU ENP, the US MEPI, and the Chinese BRI announcements. While competition in the Agadir Agreement area is primarily limited to the US ally except for in Egypt, the rise of China and, to a lesser extent, Russia challenges the EU influence in other member states of the GAFTA agreement. This is especially the case since China offers an alternative model without the attachment of conditionalities. Hence, the findings of this thesis on this scale can be partially linked to the literature strand focusing on geopolitical and security factors as established by, for instance, Antkiewicz & Momani (2009) and Brunelli (2011). Limited to civil powers, the EU employs trade policy and the regional integration promotion strategy to improve its geopolitical standing vis-à-vis other influential powers in the region.

The agency of the regional partners of the EU represents another partially limiting and partially enabling factor for the EU to exploit the economic potential of the MENA through its promotion strategy. The agreement contents and the public opinion survey results reveal the clear focus and perceptions of the EU's role in economic development, with less attention given to the spread of political ideals. However, the Agadir Agreement text analysis confirmed the significant influence of the EU economic ideology and standards on the regional integration project. In contrast, the GAFTA agreement focuses primarily on the shared Arab identity as a mechanism against external intervention and develops its own standards. State leaders' attitudes and, specifically, the regionalism conceptions employed for establishing the different regional arrangements could explain the outcomes present in the agreement texts. While the Arab League's drive for regionalism was embedded in sovereignty demands, the Agadir and GCC aims were driven by economic goals. They thus were closely aligned with the EU objectives. Hence, the extent of the alignment of regionalism conceptions and the ability of the EU to impose its standards and rules impacted the EU strategy. This can also be linked to findings of the broader CPE literature, which highlighted the role of the imperialist and hegemonic drive for the alignment with EU rules and models and the imposition of economic interests (Hanieh, 2013).

In addition, to the ability of the EU to influence the partner states, the regional economic dynamics of the partner states were found to play a central role. The reforms implemented in the agricultural and industrial sectors as part of the ENP and Agadir Agreement benefitted large farms and businesses closely affiliated with the state leaders, leading to losses for small businesses and farms. Thus, the outcomes of the proposed measures and the regulatory framework promoted by the EU provided an incentive for state elites of the Agadir members

to cooperate with the EU. Similarly, the ability to upkeep preferential access to the EU market for the textile and clothing sector after the end of the multi-fiber agreement offered an incentive. These incentives were not present in all GAFTA states with more access to EU competitor markets or are more domestically oriented. Thus, the preferences, conceptions, and incentives of especially the local state elites were found to be an additional central explanatory factor. Mutually influencing and related, the dynamics at the three levels thus explain the differential EU regional economic integration strategy in the MENA.

While this analysis enabled a more holistic grasping of the economic influence of the EU in the region and provided an answer to the research question, there are some limitations to the research. Language barriers limited the access to additional primary documents for the analysis at the regional scale. This is also linked to the author's positionality as an EU citizen. Additionally, some concepts employed as part of the CPE framework, such as Harvey's (2005) conception of neoliberalism, remain Westernized and should be increasingly adapted to the regional context. Thus, more insights from the MENA perspective beyond opinion polls and limited access to translated documents are needed for future research. Future research could also focus on the impact of more recent developments, such as COVID-19 and the Ukraine-Russia war-related trade distortions, on the EU involvement in the region. Further, the influence of the heightened tensions between the US and its EU ally with China and the ongoing decoupling movement on the EU strategy and the political economy of the MENA region represents a topic worthwhile for future research.

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