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*(In)stability and Migration  
in North Africa*

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## Background Rationale and Content

- In July 2018, a Euro-Mediterranean Research Network on Migration (*EuroMedMig*) was launched during the 15<sup>th</sup> IMISCOE Annual Conference in Barcelona, with an initial composition of 18 Members in the Steering Committee. Countries covered are: Algeria, Belgium, Egypt, Europe (EU), Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, France, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Norway, Netherlands, Tunisia and Turkey. It has initially received institutional support from The Union for the Mediterranean and academically recognized as an IMISCOE Regional Network.
- This WP Series is the first part of a specific action within a three-year (2019-2022) Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Network Program (Project Reference: 611260-EPP-1-2019-1-ES-EPPJMO-NETWORK) entitled “Mapping European Mediterranean Migration Studies” (*EUMedMi*) and coordinated by GRITIM-UPF. More information about the project can be found at [www.upf.edu/web/euromedmig](http://www.upf.edu/web/euromedmig)
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### ***Abstract***

This paper addresses the relation between political instability and international migration in the three North African countries that have experienced instability in the 2010s, namely Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. This instability ranged from uprising and revolution to state failure. The paper is particularly concerned with migration to the European Union but also that between the three North African countries. The paper invalidates the assumption that instability and ensuing economic crisis magnify already large international migration outflows. These were not large to begin with. And neither from Tunisia, nor certainly from Egypt, did instability in the 2010s engender larger outflows to the EU than previously. It is instability at destination in the same North Africa, in Libya, that produced large return and transit flows to Egypt and Tunisia. This confirms what Egypt experienced in the 1990s, when occupation and war in Kuwait and Iraq sent Egyptian workers back to their country.

### ***Keywords***

(In)stability, North Africa, Migration, Return

### ***Author's biographical note***

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## **Introduction**

In exploring the relation between political instability and international migration in North Africa, this paper examines the cases of the three countries of the region, namely Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, that were engulfed in uprisings, revolutions or civil strifes in the 2010s. The consequences of instability for international migration to the European Union (EU) is particularly addressed. The EU had shown serious signs of concern about the flows that would flood it as a result of instability in its neighbours on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Considering the consequences of instability requires examining the drivers of international migration in times of political stability. These drivers command the persistence or alteration in migration flows and directions.

For the EU, in conditions of stability, migration from North Africa to its member states responds to a neo-classical and push-pull rationale (Castles, De Haas & Miller, 2014; Sammers & Collyer, 2017). To summarize, in North African countries high population and labour force growth, low employment growth and deficient terms and conditions of employment push workers to look for jobs elsewhere. Wage differentials are the powerful drivers of migration. To this may be added a mismatch in demand and supply of labour. Network theory has also been put to use. Certain individuals and groups take on the role of mediating between migrants and demand for labour in the north. In a context of constrained migration, smugglers are active. The neoclassical and network theories were at the basis of policies put in place by the EU and its member states to bring migration from North Africa under control. Following this rationale, when instability breaks out, the dynamics pushing flows out of North Africa are magnified. To prevent increased flows and to face up to them, policy measures of normal times are expanded and reinforced (European Commission; De Haas & Sigona, 2012). The neoclassical and network explanation of migration from the two North African countries of origin under study, Egypt and Tunisia, is not sufficient. Wage differentials exist but substantive excess labour supply over demand is only valid for Egypt. Necessary complements are the arguments put forward by the world systems and dual labour market theories (Castles, De Haas & Miller, 2014). These arguments will be briefly elaborated upon in the corresponding section below.

Political instability for purposes of this paper encompasses uprisings, revolutions, civil strifes and disputes between countries of origin and destination. In the EU perspective, instability should result in economic slowdown and reduced domestic demand for labour that push workers to seek external employment. Instability should also

drive people to seek protection or safety in reachable countries. Members and supporters of fallen regimes, or “losers” in civil strifes would flee their home countries and seek protection in Europe. Seen from the standpoint of North African countries of origin, political factors bringing about instability may also exist in countries of destination. Especially for Tunisia, the xenophobic and anti-migrant discourse of populist parties and movements in the EU may be of consequence for its current and prospective migration.

Libya, a country of destination of its own, was not considered as engendering migration of its own nationals to Europe in periods of stability. Only as a transit had it been of concern to the EU. In times of instability, the EU was concerned about the losers who, like their fellow Egyptians and Tunisians, would look for protection in the EU. However, rather than flows to the EU, for this paper instability in Libya resulted in return migration to Egypt and Tunisia and to the numerous countries of origin of the migrant workers it hosted.

This paper explores whether the EU concerns about international migration from North Africa was supported by evidence from the period of instability in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya in the 2010s decade. It is worth pointing out that Egypt and Tunisia, the two North African countries of origin under study, are essentially inserted in different migration systems.<sup>1</sup> Egypt is primarily part of Arab migration systems with the Gulf countries, Libya and Jordan.<sup>2</sup> The Euro-Mediterranean system is only secondary for Egyptian migrants (De Bel-Air, 2016a). This will command reviewing Egyptian migration to Arab destinations. Tunisia is mainly inserted in a migration system linking it to Europe, in addition to one associating it to Libya (De Bel-Air, 2016b).

The first proposition in this paper is that in conditions of political stability, migration from North Africa should continue in comparable magnitudes to those of the last several years. It is predictable. Stability is understood as the perpetuation of present economic and political factors. In section 1, a review of migration from Egypt and Tunisia in the migration systems in which they are inserted will be undertaken. The purpose of this review is to bring out the stability of the magnitude of the two countries' migration and

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<sup>1</sup> See Castles, De Haas and Miller (2014) for critical reviews of these and other migration systems.

<sup>2</sup> See Castles, De Haas and Miller (2014) for an elaboration on the concept of migration system that assumes that ‘migration is intrinsically linked to other forms of exchange, notably flows of goods, ideas and money.’

of the relative weight of EU destinations in each.

The second proposition in the paper is that political instability affects both the magnitude and direction of migration flows. Here labour demand in countries of destination is the main driver of migration. Section 2 will be devoted to reviewing past evidence of political instability in the migration systems in which the two countries are inserted. This is of particular significance for Egypt whose migration destinations have been characterized by more instability than Tunisia's. The current operation of economic and political factors in Egypt and Tunisia and in their destinations will be examined in section 3. The aim is to bring out their implications for the short- to medium-term potential future migration and return migration in North Africa. Some remarks will conclude.

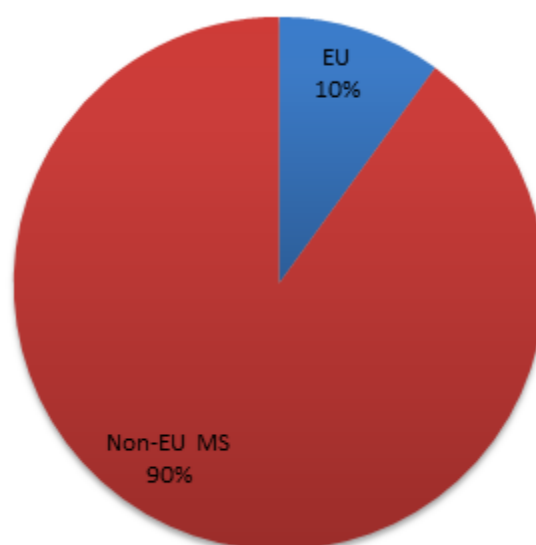
### **1. Migration from Egypt and Tunisia**

The EU labour markets are only of secondary importance for Egyptian migrant workers. The main labour markets for Egyptian migrant workers are in Arab countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in Jordan, Libya and in past decades in Iraq. Mass migration to these destinations starting in the 1970s was not only occasioned by wage differentials and excess supply of labour in Egypt. The neoclassical and networks explanations of Egyptian migration need to be complemented by structural perspectives. Changing economic structures in the said Arab countries, resulting from large oil revenues starting in the middle of decade, generated demand for labour that could not be met by native workers. The volumes and characteristics of national labour forces were insufficient. Natives also shunned jobs in the secondary sector, a situation comparable to that described by Piore for industrialized countries (Castles, De Haas & Miller, 2014).

Among the Arab migration systems in which Egypt is inserted, the most important one brings together with the GCC countries. In one estimate, in 2015, Egyptian migration to the GCC amounted to 2.27 million. It represented 67.6 per cent of Egyptian migration to Arab countries and 51.6 per cent of its stocks in the whole world. Saudi Arabia accounted for 29.3 per cent and 22.4 per cent respectively. It was followed in the GCC by Kuwait with 17.9 per cent and 13.6 per cent and by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with 11.9 per cent and 9.1 per cent respectively. Egypt maintains a bilateral migration system with Jordan, this country being host to an estimated 650,000 workers in 2015, representing 19.3 per cent and 14.8 per cent of Egyptian migration to the Arab region and

to the world respectively. Libya is a common migration partner for both Egypt and Tunisia. Estimates had made Libya the first destination for Egyptian migrant workers, hosting around 2 million of them, before the fall of the Gaddafi regime and the collapse of the Libyan state (MPC Team, 2013a). The long common borders, kinship relations between some population groups on the two sides, networks formed during decades of migration and the large Libyan informal economy were factors that facilitated Egyptian migration to Libya. Even after the shrinkage of Egyptian migration to Libya, Arab countries were still host in 2015 to some 76.3 per cent of Egyptian migration (Abdelaziz & Zohry, forthcoming). For comparative purposes, it is noteworthy that the 1980s were a decade in which a large stock of Egyptian migration accumulated in Iraq (Talani, 2010). Such as for the GCC countries, the rise in oil prices in 1973-74 and 1979-80 had produced large revenues for Iraq, which financed development projects that generated demand for foreign labour. Additionally, in Iraq's case, in the 1980s, jobs in different economic sectors left vacant by Iraqis mobilized in the long Iran-Iraq war created demand for Egyptian workers (Farrag, 1999). This is another evidence of the primacy of demand for over-supply in generating labour migration. The Euro-Mediterranean migration system is only secondary for Egypt. Member States of the EU are destinations of an estimated 10 per cent only of Egyptian migration (Abdelaziz & Zohry, forthcoming). This is in contrast to 81 per cent for Tunisia (De Bel-Air, 2016b).

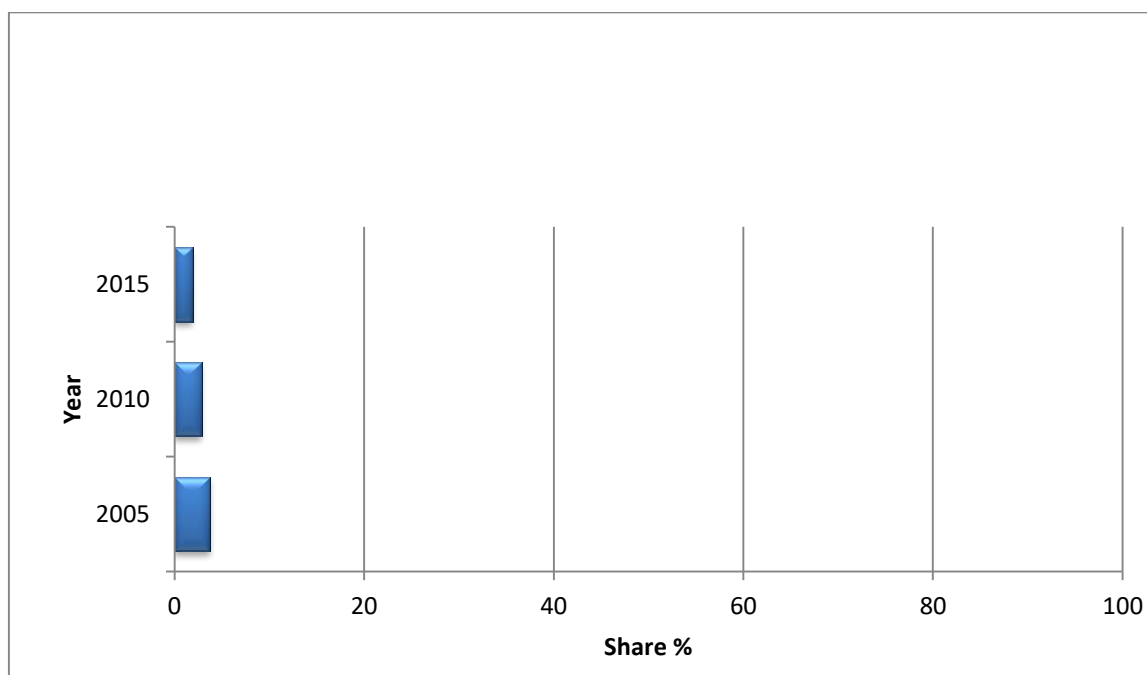
**Figure 1: Share of the EU in total Egyptian migration in the 2010s (%)<sup>3</sup>**



<sup>3</sup> Figures are based on tables consolidated by Zohry, A.

Administrative sources of the Ministry of Interior show slight increases in the volume of Egyptian migration between 2005 and 2015. These are the records of the foreign employment permits Egyptian workers have to acquire. They are certainly not exhaustive of all Egyptian migrants but are indicative of trends. In 2005, new and renewed permits amounted to 784,912. By 2010 and 2015, they had reached 1,121,199 and 1,327,542 consecutively. The increase was substantial, amounting to 43 per cent between 2005 and 2010 and modest, at 18 per cent, in the following five-year period. But from among total numbers, in the three indicated years the share of permits for workers employed in European countries kept decreasing. From 3.78 per cent, this share dropped to 2.87 per cent and 1.9 per cent.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 2: Share of EU Member States in external employment permits issued to Egyptian migrant workers in selected years (%)**



The migration systems in which Egypt is inserted are all communicating. This is brought out by the common characteristics of Egyptian migrants to Arab and to EU countries and the similarity of their migration projects. The migration of Egyptian low- and mid-skilled workers is almost entirely male. Whether in Arab or EU countries, Egyptian low- and mid-skilled workers return to Egypt after a certain number of years

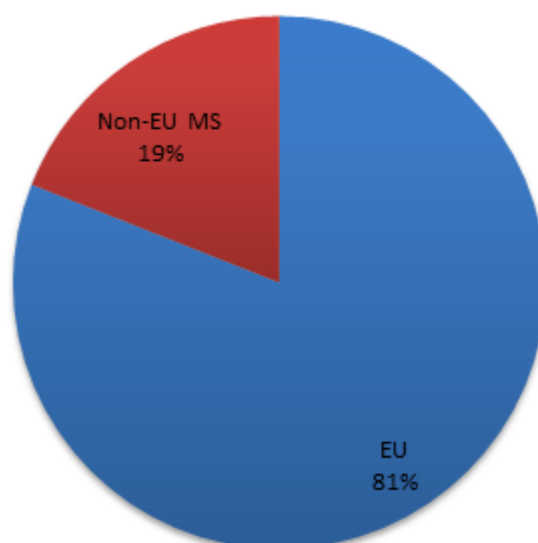
<sup>4</sup> Unpublished tables consolidated by Zohry, A. based on annual information published by the Egyptian Ministry of Interior.

(Zohry, 2009). The exception to this model is the migration systems in which Egypt is inserted with North America and Australia. Egyptian migrant workers there are mostly highly-skilled and accompanied by their families. They settle in these traditional settlement migration countries.

In the case of Tunisia, migration to Europe is better explained by colonial ties and arguments of the world systems and dual labour market theories (Castles, De Haas & Miller, 2014). Colonial ties and the development of the world economy have placed Tunisia in the periphery of the European core, especially of France and Italy. In the core, native workers are unmotivated to take up low-paid jobs at the lowest levels of the occupational hierarchies. Tunisian, like Moroccan and workers of other nationalities, step in to fill these jobs. The implication of this complementary explanation is that demand for labour is the main determinant of Tunisian migration. Demand not increasing at destination, this is a reason not to expect large flows of Tunisian migrants in times of instability in their country.

The total number of Tunisians living abroad was estimated in 2014 at 1.2 million (Boubakri & Araïssia). The preliminary results of the 2014 population census revealed that in the five-year period 2009-2014, the number of individuals having left Tunisia amounted to 71,600, or a little less than 15,000 annually. This volume is practically equal to that of the 2004 census. In the corresponding five-year period, 70,700 individuals had left the country. Outflows of Tunisian migration are obviously insignificant. It may also be safely assumed that, at least in 2004-2009, a good part took the direction of Libya.

**Figure 3: Share of EU Member States in total Tunisian migration in the 2010 (%)**



## **2. Sources of political instability: Evidence from the past**

Potential of political instability exists in all migration systems in which Egypt and Tunisia are inserted. A review of past instances of instability in these systems that resulted in large population movements should help bring evidence in support of the conceptualization, drawn out in the introduction, of sources of instability and their migration consequences.

### ***2.1. Political instability and Egyptian migration***

The Egyptian uprising in January-February 2011 was a clear instance of political instability. However, it did not produce the migration outflows dreaded by possible destination countries. On the contrary, anecdotal reports signalled that in unknown numbers, even if admittedly not very large, Egyptian migrants returned to Egypt to participate in the uprising and to contribute to building a new future for the country. The first assumption about the immediate effects of political instability on Egypt as country of origin was refuted. Surveys of Egyptian youth carried out in 2012 and 2013 brought out that the desire to migrate had not surged (Awad). Estimates by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) show that the number of Egyptians crossing the Mediterranean was almost halved between 2011 and 2012, dropping from 2,227 to 1,226 (IOM Egypt, 2015; IOM Egypt, 2016). But the events starting in 2012 and their consequences inverted trends and directions. The access to power of a Muslim Brother president in 2012, the adoption of an Islamist constitution towards the end of that year and the influence of *Salafi* political Islam pushed numbers of Egyptians to migrate. IOM estimates show an increase, albeit not alarming, of Egyptians crossing the Mediterranean from 3,604 in 2015 and to 4,230 in 2016.

As pointed out in the introduction, instability affecting migration is not only at origin. It may also be at destination or in the relations between countries of origin and destination. However, since it started in mass volumes in the 1970s, Egyptian labour migration in the GCC countries has not been affected by political rows and rifts. In the late 1970s, the peace treaty it concluded with Israel resulted in the severance by member states of the League of Arab States (LAS), including the GCC countries except Oman, of diplomatic relations with Egypt. Relations were only resumed after Egypt was readmitted to the LAS in 1989. All the while, however, Egyptian migrant workers remained in the GCC, ebbing and growing in numbers following demand for labour. Demand for necessary labour obviously trumped political considerations.

The apparent lack of sensitivity of Egyptian migration to political instability in the Egypt-GCC migration system was confirmed in 2011-13. Saudi Arabia and the UAE had been apprehensive about the Egyptian Uprising and the removal of former president Hosni Mubarak. The two countries were outright hostile to the government led by a Muslim Brother president between the end of June 2012 and the beginning of July 2013. Rumours of ending the employment of Egyptian migrant workers and sending them back to Egypt circulated but did not materialize. It was claimed that the two countries reduced their contracting of new Egyptian migrant workers during these two years. But in the absence of figures on annual flows, published either by Egypt or by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the allegation is not possible to ascertain. It is not possible either, and for the same reasons, to consider whether flows of Egyptian migration to the two countries noticeably grew after the July 2013 political change. This change in Egypt brought to power a transitional and then a constitutional regime with close friendly relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which otherwise was manifested in important amounts of financial assistance (Young, 2015). It may be considered that domestic political instability in Egypt, much like the regional instability it had occasioned in the late 1970s, did not affect the Egypt-GCC migration system. Instability in Egypt or originating in its regional policies therefore is not a major determinant of migration to the GCC. However, a proviso is that this instability did not directly affect the relations between Egypt, on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia and the UAE, on the other. It remains to be seen whether instability that directly affects their relations would have an impact on Egyptian migration.

However, one major event produced largely important consequences for Egyptian labour migration. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, some 300,000 Egyptian migrant workers returned to Egypt (De Bel-Air, 2016a). Still more important were the consequences of the war launched to liberate Kuwait and then particularly the sanctions imposed on Iraq by the United Nations Security Council in the 1990s over suspicions of manufacturing weapons of mass destruction. No new flows took the direction of Iraq and migrant workers who were there progressively returned to Egypt. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the violence that engulfed the country since completely ended the attraction of Iraq for migrant workers from Egypt. The Egypt-Iraq migration system came to an end (Zohry, 2014; Farrag, 1999). This system had been an opportunity for Egyptian workers in search of jobs or of higher income. Its vanishing meant that they might look for alternatives in the other migration systems in which the country is inserted. Clearly, it is instability at both the Kuwait and Iraq destinations that affected Egyptian migration.

In the late 1970s, relations between Egypt and Libya badly deteriorated. Egyptian migrants were deported. But the deportation only affected small numbers. Before long migration between the two countries had been re-established in its previous dynamics (Farrag, 1999). But after the collapse of the state, in the aftermath of the fall of the Gaddafi regime, and the multiplication of extremist groups in the vast Libyan territory the volume of Egyptian migration was drastically reduced. Two pieces of evidence point to the consequences of instability in Libya on Egyptian migration. First is the kidnapping and beheadings of 21 Egyptian migrant workers in 2015 (Ahram Online, 2015). Second is the large return of Egyptian migrants. Reports on the number of Egyptian returnees widely varied, between 173,873 organized returns and an estimated total number of 800,000 returnees (Zohry, 2014). Return epitomizes the conjunction of direct political and indirect economic effects of political turmoil. Having been pushed back to Egypt as a consequence of political instability in Libya, returnees now had to face a difficult labour market situation.

Another consequence of the turmoil in Libya was the flight towards Egypt of tens of thousands of migrant workers of numerous nationalities. By June 2011, a few months after the civil strife broke out in Libya, some estimated 90,000 migrants had arrived in Egypt. They were flown to their countries of origin by the IOM with funding from the World Bank and other sources.

The review of instances of large Egypt return migration from Iraq, Kuwait and Libya the primacy of demand for labour in countries of destination over supply in driving migration flows in conditions of instability. Wage differentials and excess supply of labour in Egypt persisted. But it is the drop in structural demand for Egyptian labour in Iraq, Kuwait and Libya that occasioned return. The drop resulted from revolution, occupation and civil strife. It is noteworthy that in Iraq's case, an extreme form of instability, war with Iran, had been at the origin of incoming flows of Egyptian labour migration.

## ***2.2. Political instability and Tunisian migration***

Political turmoil in the form of protests in North Africa first erupted in Tunisia at the end of 2010. It soon turned into a full-fledged revolution that toppled the head of state and his regime in January 2011. Building blocks for the construction of an alternative democratic political system were rapidly put in place. Self-exiled political opponents embarked on return migration from Europe to participate in the process of democratic

transition. No estimates are available for the volume of this return migration. But it is significant to note that political change produces hope and may reverse the direction of migration. This is similar to but more significant than what happened in Egypt around the same time. Large movements of the losers in regime change, i.e. figures of the fallen authorities, were not witnessed. However, the uncertainty and the security vacuum that accompany transitions between regimes facilitated a wave of unauthorized migration in the spring 2011. Some 28,000 Tunisians arrived in Italy in 2011 (UNHCR, 2012). This flow was considered a forerunner of more to land in Italy and then to circulate in the EU. A sense of crisis broke out and free mobility between Italy and France was for a short while suspended. Nevertheless, this flow was not reproduced. The number of Tunisians crossing the Mediterranean dropped to 2,025 the following year and further to 880 in 2015, only to pick up to 2,700 in 2017 (MPC Team, 2013b for 2008-2012 estimates; IOM, 2017 for 2014-2017 estimates). The drying up of this migration, despite political turmoil and the negative economic growth in 2011 may have several explanations. The EU Schengen visa regime and policies of coast surveillance and patrolling, coupled with improved border control by Tunisian authorities supported by the EU and Member States are among the explanations (Awad & Hedayat, 2017).

Tensions and an acrimonious political environment extended during the whole constitutive process, from October 2011 to January 2014 (Saleh, 2015). Hope was severely battered and yet no sizeable Tunisian migration outflows were registered. The operation of the visa regime, coast surveillance and border control can be considered to have also been effective in this instance. The period of the confrontational constitutive process and the years that followed its successful completion in January 2014 were plagued with violence. Assaults against cultural events, murder of members of security forces and the assassination of two prominent political figures are examples of this violence. As if this was not sufficient, to deal a fatal blow to tourism, the main source of foreign exchange and a vital sector for employment in Tunisia, attacks were staged against the Bardo Museum in Tunis in May 2015 and a beach resort near Sousse in June 2015 in which a great number of tourists were killed. Yet again, terrorist violence did not produce significant migration outflows.

In the 1980s, sizeable return had been registered from Libya when relations between the two countries experienced a period of tension.<sup>5</sup> However, migration soon resumed its normal course like for Egypt in the late 1970s. But as of 2011, like for Egypt, turmoil in Libya resulted in migration flows to Tunisia. This was articulated in three types. One is return migration of Tunisian workers from Libya, a major destination in the last few decades. The second is the movement of Libyan supporters of the fallen regime and nationals just fleeing violence, both groups seeking protection in Tunisia. Estimates of Libyans reaching Tunisia and hosted in camps or in the midst of the urban population widely varied between the 8,772 of the 2014 population census and the 100,000 to 200,000 calculated by Boubakri (Boubakri, 2015). The third type was that of transit migration of migrant workers returning from Libya, through Tunisia, to their countries of origin in other sub-regions of Africa and in Asia. Also, such as for Egypt, this last group of transit migrants, estimated at 280,000, did not remain long in Tunisia. IOM flew them back to their countries of origin, with funding from the EU, the World Bank and other donors. It is worth underlining that out of the estimated 790,000 migrants having fled Libya until the end of September 2011, only 27,465, equivalent to 3.9 per cent, reached Europe (Aghazarm, Quesada & Tishler, 2012). In contrast to Libya, no sudden large return was recorded at any time from the largest destinations of Tunisian migration in the EU. This may be explained by stability in both EU Member States and in their relations with Tunisia. Structural demand for migrant labour from Tunisia is stable. It is reinforced by the persistence of core-periphery structures developed during the extension of the world system and in the context of colonial relations.

### ***2.3. Political instability and migration in Egypt and Tunisia: A comparison***

Compared to Tunisia, Egypt's migration is more vulnerable because of the actual or potential instability in the primary external labour markets of its workers in Arab countries. Tunisian workers' external labour markets are in Europe and Libya. The latter country has been in turmoil since 2011 and is still unstable and unpredictable. The EU, in contrast, despite difficulties, particularly in some of its Mediterranean Member States, is stable and predictable. Predictability here means making forecasts based on the projection into the future of past trends. This predictability was not diminished by the

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<sup>5</sup> Estimates of Tunisians deported from Libya in 1985 vary between 30,000 and 50,000 according to Libyan and Tunisian sources respectively. See Pliez (2004).

rising incidence of far right, populist and anti-immigrant political parties and movements. Their structures of production and of demand for labour persist. In comparison, as evidenced by developments since the 1970s, the labour markets of Egyptian workers are in potentially unstable, less predictable, countries and regions, which affects the functioning of their economies and the demand they generate.

### **3. Future of migration in North Africa in the short- to medium-term**

Based on the reviews in the sections above, this section 3 aims at shedding light on the possible future of migration in the three North African countries. The review in section 1 showed the limited magnitude of this migration in the past. In the short- to medium-term, this limited migration should persist. Section 2 brought out that the principal impact of political factors has been large return migration. In line with this observation, this section 3 will essentially attempt to project into the short- to medium-term future the likely consequences of possible political instability for migration and return migration in the three North African countries under consideration. Libya has been a major country of destination of migrants from Egypt and Tunisia, the countries of origin in North Africa that have experienced instability in the 2010s. The same Libya has been in turmoil for the entire decade and still is. In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of migration in North Africa, Libya has to be considered. If and when migration to Libya is resumed, the dynamics of migration from Egypt and Tunisia is likely to be significantly affected. Therefore, a sub-section will be devoted to examining the unfolding of political factors in Libya that should determine its reconstitution as an integrated state, in which a functioning economy generates demand for migrant labour.

#### ***3.1. Migration from Egypt and Tunisia in conditions of political stability***

In conditions of political stability, the very low flows of North African nationals' migrating across the Mediterranean to the EU, shown in section 1, should persist into the short- to medium-term future. In the case of Egypt, the primacy of Arab labour markets for its migrants should remain unaltered. Excess labour supply should not significantly increase, if at all, in Tunisia, where population and labour force growth are low. The EU policies further impede possible significant flows of North African nationals.

It is rather changes in demand for labour in countries of destination that can have an impact on migration flows and stocks of North African migrants. A substantial and

extended drop in oil prices may have serious consequences for demand in the GCC labour markets, the primary destinations for Egyptian migrant workers. As happened around the mid-1980s when oil prices dropped, outflows would be reduced and return migration would rise. Because the Egypt-GCC and Egypt-EU migration systems communicate, attempts to migrate to Europe may increase. However, The EU policy has been effective in keeping migration under control. This effectiveness was reinforced by the distance between Egyptian coasts and the European North Mediterranean countries. But the pressures of returnees and of those who could not migrate at all may have political consequences, which should be a source of concern for partners in migration systems. Migration is not the only concern of partners in migration systems.

In the light of past experience, economic slowdown in Europe should not result in sizable return migration to Tunisia, as long as the drop in demand for migrant labour is not structural as is the case in the absence of major political instability. This is a lesson of the 2007-08 global financial crisis (Awad, 2009). Mindful that if they left, they could not return when the economy picked up, migrants remained in their destinations in Europe. Ironically, this is an indication of the “success” of the EU visa policy. However, it has also been pointed out that economic slowdown resulting in lower demand for “fresh” migrant labour, in the persistence of excess supply of labour may result in major upheavals in North African countries. This was one explanation for the 2010-11 Arab uprisings (Fargues, 2013). This should be another source of concern for partners in migration systems, which also encompass other exchanges of importance to EU destination countries.

### ***3.2. Migration from North Africa in conditions of political instability in the short- to medium-term***

The factors of political instability that may produce migration movements will be reviewed first in Egypt and Tunisia and then in Libya, the major destination for migrants from the two countries.

#### ***a) Political factors in Egypt***

The political situations in Egypt and Tunisia have calmed down, in comparison with the years around the middle of the decade. The two countries experience no turmoil or upheavals at present. Yet, sources of instability in both have not completely disappeared.

Egypt faces terrorism and terrorist activities in the Sinai Peninsula, the Western desert and in the very same Nile Valley. Terrorists are organized in several Jihadi groups

that have stricken massive blows against symbols of the state and some population groups. All the same, violent groups are not in a position to win in their confrontation with the state and society. In contrast, sectarian discourse and practices, and extremist cultural discourse may push some population groups to migrate. However, this is not likely to happen in any significant numbers in the near future.

A potential of instability exists in the primary destinations of Egyptian migrants in the GCC and Jordan. If tensions between most GCC countries and Iran were to degenerate, Egyptian migration would be hardly hit. The consequences would be felt in Egypt as well as possibly in the other labour markets of Egyptian migration, such as the European. A severe drop in oil prices may have the same effect. A destabilization of Jordan resulting from the unresolved occupation of Palestinian territories could produce similar consequences.

#### *b) Political actors in Tunisia*

Tunisian politics may be seen through the prism of either of two primary cleavages. First is the cleavage between former regime supporters and the advocates of political transformation. Among the latter, a secondary cleavage is between a stream calling for profound revolutionary change and another inclined to compromise and to reintegrate a good number of former regime supporters. The concern of this second stream is with economic recovery and the resumption of normal life. This secondary cleavage was brought out by the protracted and acrimonious disputes over the economic reconciliation law, which was finally adopted in September 2017. The Islamist/secular divide is the second primary cleavage. Ennahda, the Islamist majority party between 2011 and 2014 has come up first in the 2019 legislative elections but could not form a government. Mutual suspicion persists between Islamists and seculars. Also under this primary divide, secondary cleavages exist among both Islamists and seculars. Among the former, Ennahda is set against the violent *Salafi* groups. Among the secular, adherents of economic policies of neo-liberal flavour are set against advocates of more radical approaches. This secondary cleavage is similar to the corresponding one between advocates of political transformation. Despite primary and secondary cleavages and suspicions, the political situation in Tunisia does not seem threatened with eminent and serious instability. The social and political order may only be shaken by the *Salafi* groups, but these are marginal and do not constitute a vital threat. The economic situation is difficult but not likely either to undermine the political equilibrium resulting from the operationalization of the 2014 constitution. In short, the assumption may be made that the

political situation in Tunisia will not experience major disruptions in the foreseeable future. One possible explanation is that no political force is much stronger than the others in a way that decisively disrupts the current equilibrium. The absence of a powerful military with a past of direct or indirect intervention in the political process is a further guarantee of preserving the equilibrium. In sum, potential instability as cause of migration outflows is not to be envisaged in Tunisia in the short- to medium-term.

In Europe, far-right, anti-immigrant parties, even when they have entered government, are not alone in exercising power. Despite their discourse, they cannot affect the economic structures that generate demand for migrant labour. They also act within centre-periphery structures that are deeply rooted. In these conditions, fresh migration may be discarded but large return movements to Tunisia should not be expected.

### *c) Political factors in Libya*

Libya holds a great potential that can deeply affect migration dynamics in North Africa, especially for both Egypt and Tunisia. But this potential is contingent on its pacification and reintegration as a functioning country. Two incomplete and malfunctioning political systems exist in the east and west, in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, with various tribal and chieftain groups in other parts of the vast and sparsely populated country. Terrorist groups operate in different regions. Legitimacy is disputed between the governments in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, which cannot even claim to have complete control over their parts of the country. The situation is complicated by the support given by external actors to either government. Egypt strongly supports the government to the East, both politically and militarily (Elmenshawy, 2014). This may be explained by Egypt's desire to maintain security in this region bordering on its territory and by its traditional ties to Cyrenaica. Tunisia has hosted the Government of National Accord, which held its first cabinet meeting in Tunis in January 2016 before moving to Tripoli. Along with Algeria, it supports reconciliation and a political solution to the strife in Libya. The EU and concerned Member States, specifically Italy and France, though in competition, multiply efforts to consolidate power in Libya (Fasanotti & Fishman, 2018). In parallel, they took measures to train Libyan coast guards so that they effectively guard coasts and territorial waters. Preventing unauthorized migration across the Mediterranean waters is the top concern and objective of these EU measures.

The above brief description of the situation in Libya was meant to signify the difficulty of restoring peace and order in the country. The potential it holds as a destination country is not likely to materialize in the near future. Egypt and Tunisia will

remain deprived of the Libyan labour market as outlet for their excess labour supply. With migration possibilities to Europe and the GCC severely restrained, labour market pressures will mount in Egypt and Tunisia.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

In times of political stability, migration from Tunisia across the Mediterranean to the EU has been reduced in recent years. This is also true for Egyptian nationals who essentially migrate to Arab destinations in the GCC and the Middle East.

Political instability, in the form of revolutions, uprisings, civil strives, terrorism or disputes between countries of origin and destination has differential migratory consequences. Instability in the 2010s in Egypt and Tunisia did not generate large and unexpected migration movements of their nationals across the Mediterranean or elsewhere. The two countries were rather affected by instability in a major country of destination of their migrants, Libya. Out of this country, they received migration movements of several types. These included large return migration of their nationals, Libyans seeking protection, and migrants from other countries on their way home. The importance of instability in countries of destination for migration movements is borne out by Egypt's experience in the 1990s. In that decade, Egyptian migration was seriously affected and reduced as a result of the invasion of Kuwait, the war that ensued and the following sanctions imposed on Iraq. These two countries, especially Iraq, had hosted large stocks of Egyptian migration, which also spectacularly dropped after the end of the Iran-Iraq war. The different migration outcomes of the collapse of authoritarian systems in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya bring evidence to the validity of distinguishing between instability at origin and destination. Most importantly, they bring out the primacy of structural demand for labour in countries of destination for generating and maintaining labour migration.

The migration systems in which they are inserted are significant for the identification of potential sources of instability that could cause migration movements in the future. Despite the increased weight of xenophobic far right parties and movements in their political systems, EU member states do not look threatened with an instability that could affect the functioning of their economies whose structures generate demand for migrant labour. Therefore, Tunisia should not experience significant fluctuations in their migrant stocks. In Tunisia's case, reduction of its stock in Libya has occurred. Its migration to

Libya is secondary in importance. Egypt looks the most vulnerable to instability in the destinations of its migrants. The GCC countries, Jordan and Libya host some 75 per cent of its migrants. These are countries that have gone through or hold the potential of significant instability that can result to major disruptions in their economies. This exposes Egypt to potentially large return migration. The EU is only a secondary destination for Egyptian migrants.

The destination of migration from Egypt and Tunisia should be greatly affected by the evolution of the political situation in Libya. The reconstitution of an integrated, functioning, state there should recreate an operational labour market and boost demand for labour. The two countries would be the first beneficiaries. In principle, other sources of highly- and low-skilled migrant workers should benefit from the reconstruction that would ensue. The situation in Libya is evidence that migration from countries of origin is determined by the political situation and demand generated at destination.

Factors of political instability in countries of destination have to be watched. They are the main potential drivers of change in migration movements in North Africa in the short- to medium-term.

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