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NDICI-Global Europe: A Game Changer for EU Development Policy Effectiveness?

*An Evaluation of its Potential Impact focusing on the Southern
Neighbourhood*

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the potential of the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe) to improve the effectiveness of EU development policies. The analysis builds on the extensive literature exploring the major debate on the efficacy gap affecting EU development policies, identifying the lack of internal coordination from the EU side and implementation hurdles in third countries as the main reasons behind the limited effectiveness of EU actions, specifically towards the Southern Neighbourhood. This research aims to assess to what extent NDICI-Global Europe's design and mechanisms contribute to bridging the gap between outlined objectives and concrete outcomes. To this end, this contribution combines quantitative analyses of policy documents, budget allocations, and official reports with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with EU policymakers from DG NEAR and the EU delegations. Highlighting the pivotal role of local factors in shaping the outcome of development policies, this analysis concludes that NDICI's novelties contribute to bridging the efficacy gap in terms of increasing internal coordination and policy coherence. However, it underscores the instrument's limitations in addressing country-specific implementation obstacles, which are only partially met thanks to the increased flexibility and adaptability provided by NDICI's architecture. However, as the rationale behind EU policies remains largely unchanged, so do the effectiveness levels.

Keywords: NDICI-Global Europe, EU development policies, efficacy gap, Southern Neighbourhood

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ai miei amici, che hanno colorato questo percorso con la loro presenza,
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Introduction

The European Union's engagement with developing countries traces its origins to the Treaty of Rome in 1957, forming the bedrock of its external relations framework (Carbone, 2008; Hurt, 2010). Historically, EU actions have revolved around three main pillars: the provision of development aid, primarily aimed at fostering democracy and alleviating poverty; political dialogue; and bilateral trade agreements (Burni et al., 2021). Nevertheless, EU development policy has undergone a significant evolution, notably since 2005, when the adoption of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness—and later in 2015, of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development—fundamentally reshaped its priorities. These frameworks significantly reoriented EU development policies to improve effectiveness by promoting ownership, alignment, harmonisation, and mutual accountability principles. The Paris Declaration encouraged the EU to support local development strategies rather than imposing externally crafted solutions, enhance coordination with other donors, and focus on tangible results and transparency in development aid (OECD, 2005). Additionally, introducing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) broadened the scope of EU policies to include economic, social, and environmental challenges, pushing for an integrated approach to development (United Nations, 2015).

With a collective Official Development Assistance (ODA) totalling EUR 70.2 billion in 2021 (CoEU, 2022), the EU stands as the preeminent global ODA provider. Nevertheless, despite the reforms undertaken since its inception, EU development policy grapples with notable efficiency challenges, as reflected in the persistent discrepancies between stated objectives and tangible outcomes (Carbone, 2013; Carbone & Keijzer, 2016). Several factors contribute to this efficacy gap. On the EU's part, multi-governance complications—including deficient interinstitutional coordination, disjointed actions, potential incongruences between Union policies and Member States' agendas, limited financial capacity relative to the ambit of objectives, and a lack of coherence between rhetoric and practice—are pivotal (Nilsson et al., 2012; Pace, 2009). Simultaneously, in partner countries, constraints such as authoritarian governance structures, weak state capacity, low accountability, poor adherence to human rights and the rule of law, and entrenched cultural factors hinder effective implementation (Williams, 2021; Börzel & Risse, 2010).

Criticism about the highly fragmented nature of the EU's approach to international development, which often results in overlapping initiatives and inefficient use of resources, has grown sharply over the last decades (e.g. Niemann & Bretherton, 2013; Toje, 2008; Thomas, 2012). Hence,

recognising the urgent need for a more coherent and impactful strategy, key EU institutions embarked on comprehensive discussions to identify and implement viable solutions (Bodenstein et al., 2017). Therefore, in alignment with the new strategy for development cooperation inaugurated in 2016—the Global Strategy ([EEAS](#))—the EU established an entirely new regulatory framework for aid provision. The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe) was inaugurated in 2021 to enhance external cooperation across multiple dimensions (Commission, 2021). Endowed with a substantial budget of €79.5 billion, NDICI-Global Europe (NDICI-GE) epitomises a singular opportunity to address entrenched issues within the EU's development policy architecture (Gavas & Pleeck, 2021). Specifically, it consolidates most external financing mechanisms and fosters institutionalised communication to augment funding flexibility, internal coordination, policy coherence, and adaptability. However, given its relatively recent inception, the evaluation of its impact on the effectiveness of EU development policies remains a topic for ongoing debate.

Existing research thoroughly explores previous EU external cooperation instruments' performances (e.g. Balfour & Rotta, 2005; Gavvas, 2012), and some scholars have already produced a careful outline of the new instrument' novelties in terms of financing and budget allocation (Sergejeff et al., 2022). More specifically, Brie (2020) has done so concerning the Neighbourhood and Sabourin et al. (2023) have explored the impact of this new strategy on the African continent. However, an analysis of NDICI's prospective impact on policy effectiveness within the Southern Neighbourhood remains absent despite the region's strategic significance to the Union (Rizzi & Varvelli, 2022)¹. This dissertation endeavours to partially bridge this lacuna by providing a preliminary evaluation of the instrument's capacity to enhance development within the region. Addressing the research question: *“To what extent can NDICI-Global Europe contribute to bridging the efficacy gap in EU development policies, specifically towards the Southern Neighbourhood?”* this study will scrutinise key priorities and funding allocations directed at the region, alongside the instrument's design and implementation mechanisms. Crucially, this research will encompass both the coordination and coherence challenges on the EU's side and the often-overlooked influence of local conditions on the efficacy of external initiatives. This methodological approach constitutes a primary innovation of this study, particularly salient in the context of the Southern Neighbourhood—a region characterised by a complex interplay of political, economic, and social dynamics that can impede the successful implementation of development initiatives.

¹ The Southern Neighbourhood encompasses Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia. Under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU seeks to strengthen relations with its neighbouring countries to the East and South, fostering stability, security, and prosperity.

However, recognising that a full evaluation of the instrument's impact will only be feasible in the forthcoming years, the scope of this research is limited to providing initial insights, setting the stage for ongoing refinement and adjustment of development strategies based on emerging findings and evolving regional dynamics.

To this end, the dissertation is structured into six sections. The first section synthesises the prevailing literature concerning the efficacy gap inherent in the EU's development policies. This section will encompass key debates, including the politicisation of the Union's foreign policies, the ramifications of escalating securitisation and instrumentalisation on the efficacy of its actions, the rhetoric-practice gap, the capability-expectations gap as dimensions of the efficacy issue, coordination and coherence challenges, and the role of local factors. The second section delineates the theoretical framework and methodology employed for the analysis, while section three briefly traces the evolution of EU engagements with the region, focusing on Egypt and Jordan. This framework is then applied in the ensuing sections. Section four addresses the longstanding coordination and coherence issues, evaluating how NDICI's novel architecture may contribute to ameliorating these challenges. Policy papers and official reports inform this segment of the analysis. Section five focuses on the partner countries, drawing insights from semi-structured interviews with EU stakeholders engaged in Egypt and Jordan dossiers. This section elucidates the implementation challenges characterising these nations and assesses NDICI's potential to adapt to and surmount these obstacles. Finally, the concluding section will summarise the findings, highlighting persisting criticalities and advocating for more comprehensive assessments of the instrument in due course.

Section I - Literature Review

The evolution of the European Union's development policy has been comprehensively scrutinised, with analyses spanning from its origins in the Treaty of Rome to more contemporary evaluations (e.g., Bergmann et al., 2019; Carbone, 2008; Furness, 2012; Hurt, 2010). However, since the 2000s, scholarly attention has shifted from merely chronicling this evolution to probing three critical dimensions: the politicisation of EU development policy, which exacerbates the solidarity/instrumentality dilemma; the nexus between stability and security; and the efficacy gap that persists between expectations and real outcomes. This reorientation has been catalysed by a series of internal and external disruptions, including the Lisbon Treaty's structural reforms, the 2008 financial crisis, the 2015 refugee crisis, the rise of populist movements, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the growing geopolitical influence of the BRICS nations (Furness et al., 2020; Burni et al., 2022; Thier & Alexander, 2019; Price, 2019). Within this discourse, the efficacy gap has emerged as a particularly salient concern, underscored by three pivotal points: (1) The EU's foreign policy trajectory, characterised by an increasing securitisation and instrumentalisation of development policies, has contributed to widening the efficacy gap; (2) A substantial lack of policy coherence and internal coordination among EU institutions, governance levels, and external actors exacerbates this issue; (3) The success of development initiatives is heavily contingent on local factors, which play a crucial role in shaping policy outcomes. This paper applies this analytical framework to assess the potential of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument in bridging the efficacy gap within EU development policies, focusing on its impact in the Southern Neighbourhood.

The new century ushered in significant changes, ranging from institutional restructuring to shifts in policy content and focus, further blurring the boundaries and definition of EU development policy (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019). This policy has increasingly been perceived as a cornerstone for the EU, encompassing a broad array of fields and addressing both the consequences and root causes of issues such as discrimination, migration, forced displacement, energy transition, international conflict, elite corruption, and human rights abuses (Furness et al., 2020). Studies on the expansion of the EU development policy scope have explored its repercussions, noting the resulting politicisation of this area in alignment with the increasing securitisation of the broader EU foreign policy (Hilpold, 2017; Saviolo, 2023; Carbone, 2013; Chaban & Elgström, 2021; Delkader-Palacios, 2019). Indeed, following the introduction of the "European Consensus on Development", the security dimension has become entrenched with the notion of progress: "Without peace and security,

development and poverty eradication are not possible, and without development and poverty eradication, no sustainable peace will occur" (EUR-lex, 2007). This trend has particularly impacted relations with the Southern Neighbourhood and the MENA region, especially after the 9/11 attacks and the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015 (Baldarin & Wildeman, 2021; Bodenstein & Furness, 2023; Youngs & Zihnioğlu, 2021).

Constructivist studies on the issue (Roccu & Voltolini, 2017; Pace, 2009b) emphasise the pivotal role of identities and perceptions in shaping foreign policy. These scholars assert that the mutual perceptions of cultural, political, and economic identities between the EU and Southern Neighbourhood countries profoundly influence their interactions and diplomatic strategies. This perspective posits that the security-stability nexus in EU-Southern Neighbourhood relations is deeply embedded in regional and interregional dynamics (Silander & Nilsson, 2014; Dandashly, 2020). Similarly, scholars such as Schmidt (2012) and Fioramonti and Poletti (2008) stress the importance of target region perceptions in the successful implementation of policies. They argue that resistance to external policies is not merely a reflexive opposition to foreign intervention but is deeply rooted in specific historical, cultural, and political contexts. The enduring legacy of colonialism in North Africa and parts of the Middle East engenders a pervasive wariness among local governments and populations towards external attempts to influence domestic policies. Consequently, the EU faces ongoing challenges in establishing bilateral ties that transcend traditional, asymmetrical donor-recipient relationships, even as it seeks to evolve through new instruments such as NDICI-Global Europe (Bilal et al., 2021; Keijzer, 2020).

Other scholars have explained the security-stability nexus within the broader debate on the decline of EU normative power and the nature of the EU's international influence. For instance, research by Bicchi (2006) and Pace (2009a) underscores the inherent tension within EU policy, wherein the pursuit of regional stability often conflicts with its professed normative goals, such as democracy promotion and human rights advocacy. These scholars contend that the EU's normative power is compromised whenever it opts for trade-offs under the guise of stabilising the region. This *realpolitik* approach may achieve short-term stability but at the expense of long-term democratic transitions, exacerbating the gap between the EU's rhetorical commitments and the tangible outcomes of its actions—commonly referred to as the rhetoric-practice gap. Del Sarto (2016) introduces the "Empire Europe" concept to critique the EU's strategy, suggesting that it operates imperialistically, imposing stability through control rather than genuinely fostering development through partnership. This pragmatic shift is perceived as a response to various challenges, including migration crises, terrorism, and regional instability, prompting the EU to prioritise immediate security concerns over

long-term developmental objectives. This approach has been particularly criticised in the context of the Arab Spring, which many viewed as a missed opportunity for significant democratic transformation in the region (Bicchi, 2014; Hollis, 2012; Youngs & Zihnioğlu, 2021; Roccu & Voltolini, 2018). Finally, Damro (2012) posits that the EU increasingly operates as a market power, prioritising economic interests over its core values (Furness et al., 2020; Holden, 2020). This shift, exemplified by the relegation of democracy and human rights objectives to conditionalities attached to trade agreements, exacerbates the instrumentalisation of EU foreign policies at the expense of solidarity, thereby deepening the discrepancies between rhetoric and practice and undermining the coherence of EU actions (Herceg-Kolman & Bandov, 2022).

The persistent gap between the objectives and outcomes of EU external and development policies has been extensively examined in relation to coordination challenges. Researchers such as Furness (2012) have analysed how institutional changes, particularly those introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, have compounded the complexity of managing EU development policy within an increasingly geopolitical European Commission. The Treaty established the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the role of the High Representative, assigning them substantial responsibilities in the programming cycle. While the European Commission retains oversight of external cooperation instruments, the EEAS has been tasked with setting the financial envelopes for each country and region and developing national and regional indicative programs and strategy papers, adding a significant layer of complexity to the governance of EU external actions (Furness, 2012).

Moreover, development policy operates under a shared competence framework, where decision-making occurs at both the European and national levels. This Division of Labour (DoL) complicates policy management and governance and impacts policy coherence (Kugiel, 2020). In this respect, Ashoff (2005) highlights that while the division of labour is intended to streamline processes and enhance efficiency by delineating clear roles, it often results in siloed operations, where inadequate communication between departments and governance levels hampers effective policy implementation. This disjointed approach can produce inconsistent policies that fail to address the complexities of development challenges comprehensively. Carbone and Keijzer (2016) further explore the implications of this division on policy coherence, which they define as the alignment and consistency among EU policies, between EU and national policies, and between EU policies and those of third actors. They argue that effective development policy necessitates not only internal consistency within the EU framework but also alignment with Member States' policies and conformity with international development agendas. The challenge lies in harmonising these diverse interests and strategies, which often have conflicting objectives and timelines. On the same line,

Picciotto (2005) delves into the structural aspects of this issue, suggesting that the EU's policy framework is frequently constrained by its bureaucratic structures, which are not always conducive to flexible or rapid responses to development needs. The multi-level governance structure, while providing multiple checks and balances, sometimes leads to a sluggish response rate, impeding the EU's ability to adapt its policies in response to evolving realities in partner countries.

A final aspect of the coordination-related challenges contributing to the efficacy gap is the mismatch between capabilities and expectations. This gap manifests as the discrepancy between what the EU is expected to achieve in its foreign policy and what it can realistically deliver, given the diverse interests of its Member States, limited budgetary resources, and often unrealistic expectations (Hill, 1993). This issue has gained prominence in discussions on development policies, particularly following Brexit, which has significantly widened the gap by depriving the EU of the UK's substantial contributions to the development budget (Perez & Olivie, 2020; Price, 2019; Szynol, 2020). Despite the expanding scope of development policy, funding has consistently fallen short of the 0.7% GNI commitment for aid spending in most EU countries. These underfunding issues exacerbate the challenges faced by the EU in fulfilling its development objectives, highlighting the need for more effective policy management and resource allocation.

Nevertheless, upon closer examination of the root causes underlying the efficacy gap in EU development policies, it becomes evident that the success of these initiatives and the perceived disjunction between their objectives and outcomes are profoundly influenced by the subsequent implementation process. This is particularly true within the context of the Southern Neighbourhood, where scholars have illuminated how various local factors—including state capacity, transparency, accountability, the role of civil society organisations (CSOs), the type of governance, and prevailing mistrust—interact in a complex manner that ultimately shapes development outcomes.

Effective governance is an indispensable element for the successful implementation of development policies. It encapsulates the ability of governments to design, execute, and oversee policies that foster economic growth and enhance social welfare. According to Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi (2010), governance effectiveness is multifaceted, encompassing political stability, government efficiency, regulatory quality, and adherence to the rule of law. These dimensions collectively ensure that development policies are not only theoretically sound but are also practically executable and subject to rigorous monitoring. Williams (2021) critically reassesses the conventional, aggregated concept of capacity when evaluating bureaucratic performance and policy implementation. He contends that there is frequently a pronounced discrepancy between the theoretical potential of bureaucracies—often labelled as 'capacity'—and their actual operational

behaviour. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that nations endowed with robust governance structures tend to achieve superior development outcomes. For instance, Morocco's decentralisation and local governance reform approach has yielded tangible outcomes. Despite limitations, the government's initiatives have led to some success in enhancing local development, illustrating that targeted governance reforms can contribute to more effective policy implementation when aligned with local capacities and political will (Bergh, 2017). In contrast, the post-Arab Spring period in Tunisia has been characterised by a dual trajectory. While there have been notable strides toward democratisation and transparency, these efforts have been undermined by persistent bureaucratic inefficiencies and political instability, which have hampered the implementation of development initiatives (Arieff, 2014). This juxtaposition of progress and stagnation underscores the complexity of achieving sustainable reforms in a transitional context with low levels of governance effectiveness.

The role of non-institutionalized actors, including informal networks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and CSOs, is also critical in the development process, particularly in environments where formal institutions are either weak or ineffective (Engerman & Sokoloff, 2008). These actors can supplement formal development efforts by delivering essential services, advocating for policy reforms, and mobilising community resources (Durac & Cavatorta, 2022). They play a pivotal role in reaching segments of the population that may be inaccessible to external actors, thereby providing crucial insights into partner countries' genuine needs and local dynamics. Lewis (2014), in his seminal work on NGOs, explores the evolving role of these organisations in international development. In the specific context of the Southern Neighbourhood, scholars such as Cammett (2014) have demonstrated how NGOs and community organisations in Lebanon have been vital in providing social services and pushing for policy reforms in the absence of robust state institutions. Similarly, Hammami (2000) and Mouna (2018) highlight how civil society organisations in Palestine and Morocco have successfully implemented various development projects despite the challenging political environments.

Despite ongoing structural reforms and the introduction of new discourses, the EU's development cooperation approach still faces significant challenges in achieving satisfactory levels of effectiveness. This has sparked a sustained scholarly debate about whether the numerous changes in EU development policy have truly resulted in a paradigm shift over the years. Indeed, some scholars argue that, despite apparent changes and adaptations to new challenges and geopolitical shifts, the fundamental approach and objectives of EU development policy—especially concerning the developing world—have largely remained unchanged (Delputte & Orbie, 2020; Di Ciommo,

2021; Bilal et al., 2021; Orbie et al., 2022). This debate encapsulates the broader discourse of continuity versus change within EU development policy and underscores the complexities inherent in assessing its evolution. It also raises critical questions about the efficacy of policy changes and the EU's capacity to adapt to emerging global realities while remaining true to its foundational values.

Section II - Argument & Methodology

Argument

Given the brevity of this contribution, the efficacy gap — intended as the divergence between set objectives and the tangible outcomes — will herein be analysed as the result of two main drivers. On the one hand, they extensively discussed issues of coordination and coherence, and on the other hand, the implementation problems encountered at the country level. Since this research focuses on the EU involvement in the development of the Southern Neighbourhood, the implementation hurdles referred to in section V are region-specific and not necessarily generalisable.

EU scholars of development policies and aid effectiveness primarily focus on multi-governance issues as the main driver of inefficacy (e.g. Kugiel, 2020; Carbone & Keijzer, 2016; Picciotto, 2005). In the context of EU development policies, these refer to the complexities and challenges that arise from the involvement of multiple actors at various levels of governance, including local, national, and international bodies. These issues are characterised by difficulties in coordinating and aligning policies and objectives across different governance levels, leading to inefficiencies in policy management. For instance, the EU's development initiatives in the developing world, including the Southern Neighbourhood, often involve coordination between EU institutions, Member States, partner country governments, and various international organisations, each with their own agendas and operational frameworks. This multi-level governance likely complicates policy coherence and coordination, potentially leading to overlapping responsibilities and conflicting policies (ibid).

However, this Eurocentric perspective often overlooks the relevance of internal dynamics within partner countries, which can either facilitate or hinder the successful implementation of development policies. For instance, variations in local governance structures and capacities can affect the transfer and implementation of EU policies (Börzel & Risse, 2010). Similarly, the vitality of internal political structures and civil society can affect international negotiations and policy implementation procedures (Schneckener, 2010). Countries with more accountable and transparent governance structures and robust civil society involvement tend to experience better developmental outcomes. For instance, improved public service delivery, infrastructure development, and social welfare programs often correlate with higher governance effectiveness scores.

Hence, while recognising the significance of multi-governance issues, this dissertation underscores that, in the context of the Southern Neighbourhood, where political transitions and governance challenges are prevalent, the effectiveness of governance structures, including state capacity, civil society's role, levels of accountability, transparency, human rights, and democracy are equally crucial for determining policy success.

Consequently, this contribution builds on the belief that EU development policies must be designed with an understanding of inter-institutional dynamics and tailored to address the specific implementation challenges unique to each partner country to bridge the efficacy gap effectively. This assumes that:

1. Multi-governance problems can be mitigated through improved coordination and integration of policies at different governance levels. This includes better alignment of goals, strategies, and actions between the EU, Member States, and partner countries.
2. Development policies must be flexible and adaptable to each partner country's needs and conditions. This adaptability requires a deep understanding of local factors, which should be integrated into the policy design and implementation processes.
3. Successful policy implementation is contingent upon active involvement and buy-in from local stakeholders, including governments, civil society organisations, and the population. Policies perceived as externally imposed without local input are less likely to succeed.

EU development policy has consistently evolved in the last decade to meet its objectives and improve the effectiveness of its actions. Apart from the reforms concerning the architecture of aid provision, the rationale behind development policies, specifically toward the neighbourhood, has evolved, too. Since 2016, the relationships with those regions have been guided by two principles: resilience and local ownership. The first one refers to the reform of domestic structures following Western templates to increase their viability, whereas local ownership entails the responsibility of domestic actors to implement externally developed policies (Petrova & Delcour, 2019). These should have led to increased effectiveness and the establishment of symmetrical partnerships. However, the relatively negative evaluation of EU successes in this realm signals a flaw in the system.

In light of such considerations, this research wants to assess to what extent the recent evolutions in EU development policy are sufficiently well-equipped to bridge the efficacy gap. The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) represents the most significant effort of the EU to address these challenges, aiming to improve the effectiveness of development actions. First, by combining eleven previous financing mechanisms into one, it is

deemed to improve the flexibility of funds allocation and access and streamline remits that overlapped; second, by improving the tailors of actions through more symmetrical dialogue, it should contribute to overcoming the donor-recipient paradigm; third, by reorganising the design of aid provision along a more structured approach, it should improve the effectiveness of funds repartition and internal coherence (Commission, 2021). Based on existing literature on the topic and the data collected, this dissertation will analyse these hypotheses to assess to what extent NDICI is fit for purpose.

This research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of aid effectiveness, considering both multi-governance issues and third-country implementation hurdles. It proposes that successful development policy is not merely a product of well-coordinated international efforts but also deeply contextualised and locally informed strategies. This shift in focus could potentially lead to more sustainable and impactful development outcomes, directly addressing the core issues at the heart of the efficacy gap.

Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach to gain a nuanced understanding of NDICI-Global Europe's potential to enhance the effectiveness of EU development policies in the Southern Neighbourhood. This design merges quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, offering a more complete picture than either approach alone.

Quantitative methods involved document analysis of key NDICI-Global Europe policy documents, budget allocations, and progress reports. The starting point for this analysis is the proposal for creating the NDICI-Global Europe instrument, which lays out its rationale, objectives, and anticipated outcomes within the broader EU external action framework (COM, 2018). Additionally, the analysis drew on the regulation establishing the NDICI-Global Europe instrument to gain a comprehensive overview of the instrument's architecture, including the allocation of funds, priority areas, and implementation mechanisms (Regulation (EU) 2021/947). By examining this regulation, the research is able to assess the alignment between the instrument's design and its strategic goals. The research also incorporates the official review of previous external action instruments' performance, offering a comparative perspective, identifying the shortcomings and successes of past policies and explaining how these experiences informed the development of NDICI-Global Europe (Eur-lex, 2017). Further enriching this analysis is the European Parliament's public hearing of July 2023, which focused on the implementation of NDICI-Global Europe. This hearing provides valuable

points of view from the Court of Auditors, the Commission, the EEAS, MEPs, and research institutes on the instrument, highlighting both achievements and challenges. This is complemented by the official mid-term review conducted by EU institutions earlier this year (CoEU, 2024). In addition to these official documents, the research incorporates reports from EU-related networks, such as CONCORD Europe and the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) (CONCORD, 2023; Jones & Keijzer, 2021; Jones et al., 2018a; 2018b; Di Ciommo & Sergejeff, 2021; Sabourin et al., 2023). The analysis of these reports, offering independent evaluations and critiques of NDICI-Global Europe, allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the instrument's effectiveness, particularly in its interactions with civil society organisations and its responsiveness to third countries' needs.

The qualitative analysis is conducted through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including EU policymakers from DG NEAR and an official of the EU delegation to Cairo, complementing the mixed-methods approach. These interviewees were reached via their institutional emails, some of which were provided by the Italian Permanent Representation to the EU, while the DG officials themselves have shared others. These interviews, which were carried out in compliance with ethical requirements², were crucial in exploring the intricacies of multi-governance issues at the EU level. Through direct engagement with officials responsible for various aspects of EU development policies, the research gathers detailed insights into the procedural steps of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument. These discussions also clarified recent policy innovations and highlighted concerns regarding these developments, offering unique perspectives on the internal challenges faced by the EU in the policy-making process. Additionally, interviews with staff of the EU delegation to Cairo offered a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at the local level. This official provided first-hand accounts of the challenges encountered during the implementation of EU policies, particularly regarding how local factors—such as political, social, and economic conditions—influence policy effectiveness. Their experiences of interaction and collaboration with civil society organisations emphasise their critical role in the successful execution of EU initiatives. The insights gathered through these interviews provided an inside perspective on the workings of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument and a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics between EU institutions, Southern Neighbourhood countries, and civil society organisations.

² MRSU-23/24-44962

This qualitative approach, combined with the robust quantitative analysis, is essential for building a comprehensive and contextually grounded evaluation of the instrument's potential impact, thereby enhancing the reliability and depth of the research findings.

Section III: Tracing EU development policies towards the Southern Neighbourhood

The EU's relationship with the Mediterranean Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries provides a clear example of the persistent issues affecting its development policies. As the region's complex political and social landscape interacts with EU objectives and geopolitical trajectory, the difficulties of translating ambitious policies into effective, on-the-ground results become more apparent. This section traces the evolution of these engagements, with a particular focus on Egypt and Jordan.

Relations between the two regions have deep historical roots, with formalised cooperation dating back to the inception of European integration in the mid-20th century. The 1957 Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community (EEC), included provisions for economic agreements with newly independent former colonies such as Tunisia and Morocco. This early engagement reflected not only economic interests but also the lingering influence of European colonial powers, particularly France, in the region. Algeria, still part of France until its independence in 1962, further exemplified these dynamics. In the following decades, Europe's post-colonial engagement with the MENA region was characterised by a blend of economic cooperation and security concerns. Initiatives like the 1972 Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) and subsequent cooperation efforts in the 1980s were largely driven by European economic and geopolitical interests, especially as the region faced instability due to conflicts like the Arab-Israeli war and internal unrest. The EEC's approach was often seen as an extension of colonial-era policies, with critics suggesting that Europe sought to maintain influence over its former colonies under the guise of regional stability and economic partnership (e.g. Del Sarto, 2016).

A significant shift occurred in 1995 with the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), also known as the Barcelona Process³. This initiative marked a transition from the asymmetrical relations of the past towards a more structured and multifaceted approach to cooperation. The EMP was built on three key pillars: a political and security partnership aimed at creating a shared area of peace and stability through political dialogue and security cooperation; an economic and financial partnership designed to foster economic integration by creating a free trade area and supporting economic transitions in partner countries through financial assistance and investment; and a social, cultural, and human partnership emphasising civil society engagement and

³ Barcelona Declaration adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference (1995), November 27-28.

fostering mutual understanding between Europe and the MENA region. The EMP was notable for introducing a commitment to shared values, such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, as integral components of the relationship. It also introduced the concept of region-building, where the EU sought to extend its norms, regulations, and standards to its Mediterranean partners. Despite its ambitious goals, however, the EMP faced numerous challenges. Chief among these was the stagnation of the Middle East Peace Process and the growing divergence in priorities between EU Member States and their Mediterranean partners. Political tensions in the region, including ongoing conflicts, further undermined the partnership's objectives (Menendez & Youngs, 2006).

In response to these challenges and the EU's enlargement to Eastern Europe, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was introduced in 2004 as a complementary framework to the EMP. The ENP aimed to strengthen political, economic, and social cooperation between the EU and its neighbouring countries, including those in the southern Mediterranean. One of the central features of the ENP was the bilateral Action Plans, which were tailored to each partner country's specific needs and capacities. These plans outlined the priorities for cooperation, including political reform, economic integration, and social development. The ENP also introduced a principle of conditionality, wherein the EU offered greater incentives, such as financial support and market access, to countries that demonstrated progress in democratic reforms and good governance (Del Sarto & Schumacher, 2005). While the ENP was designed to deepen cooperation, it faced significant criticism. Many argued that the policy was too Eurocentric, focusing on the promotion of European norms and standards without fully accounting for the complex political, social, and economic realities of the MENA region (Pace, 2007). The onset of the Arab Spring in 2011 exposed the limitations of the EU's approach, as the uprisings demonstrated the deep-seated governance challenges that existing policies had not adequately addressed. Initially hesitant in its response, the EU eventually sought to adjust its approach, emphasising "deep and sustainable democracy" and reinforcing political conditionality through the 'more for more' principle. This approach was intended to reward those countries willing to embark on meaningful reforms with enhanced support, including increased financial aid, greater market access, and mobility agreements.

Despite these efforts, the EU's development and foreign policy ambitions in the MENA region have been plagued by contradictions. On the one hand, the EU has promoted democratisation and liberal values, but on the other, it has often prioritised stability and security, maintaining relationships with authoritarian regimes in the interest of counterterrorism, migration management, and energy security (Youngs, 2002; Bicchi, 2009). This "democratization-stability dilemma" has led to an inconsistent policy framework, where short-term realpolitik considerations frequently override the

longer-term goals of development and political reform. Moreover, regional governments have often resisted EU-driven reforms, further complicating the Union's regional development objectives.

Following the Arab Spring, the EU undertook a comprehensive review of its neighbourhood policy in 2015, seeking to address its shortcomings. The revised European Neighbourhood Policy placed greater emphasis on differentiation, recognising that a "one size fits all" approach (Bicchi, 2006) was not appropriate given the diversity of political and economic conditions in the region. The policy also shifted towards a more pragmatic focus on stabilisation, prioritising security and economic development, and addressing the root causes of instability, such as unemployment and social exclusion. The revised ENP underscored the importance of local ownership and tailored partnerships, aiming to empower partner countries to take greater control of their development agendas while allowing the EU to respond flexibly to the varying needs of its southern neighbours (Schumacher, 2016).

The 2016 EU Global Strategy further reinforced this pragmatic turn, placing resilience and sustainable development at the heart of the EU's external action. Recognising the limits of its influence, the strategy promoted a more modest and adaptable approach, seeking to strengthen partnerships based on mutual interests rather than unilaterally promoting EU norms. The revised strategy also acknowledged the growing multipolarity of the international system, which posed new challenges and competition from global actors such as China and Russia in the MENA region (EUGS, 2016). On this note, the introduction of the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) in 2021 reflects the EU's most recent and ambitious attempt to overcome these historical obstacles by streamlining its external funding instruments and enhancing the coherence of its external actions.

These general trends in EU-MENA relations are exemplified in the EU's bilateral relationships with key MENA countries such as Egypt and Jordan, where the EU's strategic interests often intersect with its normative agenda, leading to complex and sometimes contradictory policies.

EU-Egypt relations

As the largest and most populous country in the Arab world, Egypt holds significant strategic importance for the European Union. Situated at the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, Egypt is a critical partner in matters of security, migration, energy, and regional stability. Historically, the EU-Egypt relationship has evolved through various cooperation frameworks, including the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy. However, this relationship is

also fraught with challenges, particularly in the realms of governance, human rights, and democratic reforms.

Indeed, the country's turbulent political history has heavily influenced the EU's political engagement with Egypt, especially since the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Initially, the EU welcomed Egypt's democratic transition, offering significant support to civil society and democratic institutions under the ENP. However, the military coup in 2013, which brought Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to power, dramatically altered the EU's approach. Post-2013, the EU found itself in a difficult position. While the authoritarian nature of the Sisi regime, marked by the suppression of opposition, media censorship, and widespread human rights violations, contradicted the EU's normative goals, Egypt's strategic importance led to a policy of "principled pragmatism." Stability in Egypt was deemed crucial for broader regional security, particularly in the context of counterterrorism efforts and managing migration flows (Schumacher, 2015). As a result, the EU refrained from imposing punitive measures such as sanctions, choosing instead to maintain diplomatic ties and cooperation, especially in areas like security and economic development (Comelli & Paciello, 2009). This pragmatic approach attracted criticism for undermining the EU's credibility as a global promoter of democracy and human rights.

In the economic realm, relations between the EU and Egypt are robust, with the EU being Egypt's largest trading partner. The EU-Egypt Association Agreement, signed in 2004, remains the cornerstone of their trade and economic cooperation, which includes substantial EU development aid directed toward infrastructure, education, healthcare, and rural development (European Commission and HR/VP 2015; EIB, 2018). However, economic cooperation has not been without challenges. While the EU promotes market liberalisation and economic reforms in Egypt, pervasive issues such as corruption, political instability, and regulatory unpredictability have limited the country's ability to fully capitalise on these opportunities. Moreover, while the EU provides financial support for development projects, it has often been accused of neglecting to address the deeper structural problems within Egypt's governance, which contribute to economic stagnation and inequality (*Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 2016).

Also, energy cooperation has emerged as a particularly critical area of interest. The discovery of the Zohr gas field in the Eastern Mediterranean has positioned Egypt as a potential energy hub for the region, which could help the EU diversify its energy sources and reduce dependence on Russian gas. This strategic interest has further incentivised the EU to maintain a cooperative relationship with Egypt despite ongoing concerns about governance and human rights.

Security cooperation is another key pillar of the EU's relationship with Egypt, particularly in counterterrorism (European Commission and HR/VP 2017). Egypt's fight against extremist groups, especially in the Sinai Peninsula, and its proximity to conflict zones like Libya make it a critical partner for the EU's regional security strategy. The rise of ISIS-affiliated groups and the persistent threat of terrorism in Egypt have created a strong alignment of interests between Cairo and Brussels. The EU has provided financial and technical support to Egypt for counterterrorism measures and border security, particularly through the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. However, this cooperation has sparked controversy. Human rights organisations have raised concerns that the EU's support for Egyptian security forces, which are frequently accused of violating human rights, may indirectly contribute to internal repression.

Egypt's role as a transit country for migrants and refugees seeking to reach Europe has also made it an essential partner in the EU's migration management strategy. Although Egypt is not a primary source of migrants, its geographical location makes it a significant transit hub for migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Middle East. The EU has engaged Egypt through the ENP and bilateral agreements to strengthen border control, reduce irregular migration, and provide humanitarian assistance to migrants. Egypt's cooperation in curbing migrant flows has been rewarded with financial aid and diplomatic engagement. However, this migration cooperation is criticised for focusing too much on containment and not enough on addressing the root causes of migration, such as poverty, unemployment, and political repression in both Egypt and the migrant-sending countries.

The most contentious aspect of EU-Egypt relations remains the human rights situation. Under President Sisi, Egypt has seen a sharp deterioration in civil liberties, with widespread arrests of political activists, journalists, and opposition members (HRW, 2014; European Parliament, 2006; 2016). Despite the EU's vocal criticism of these abuses, its actions have been limited. While the EU has occasionally suspended financial aid related to civil society and human rights projects, it has avoided harsher measures such as sanctions, largely due to Egypt's importance in counterterrorism and migration control. This reluctance to take a firmer stand on human rights has led to accusations that the EU is compromising its principles for short-term security and economic gains. Critics argue that by failing to push harder for democratic reforms, the EU is enabling the Sisi regime's authoritarianism and undermining its credibility as a global advocate for human rights (EuroMed Rights, 2016).

EU-Jordan relations

Similarly, the relationship between the European Union and Jordan stands as a notable case of pragmatic cooperation, shaped by the delicate balance between promoting stability and advancing normative values such as democracy and human rights. Unlike other states in the region, Jordan has maintained relative political stability under its constitutional monarchy. However, this stability has been paired with limited political liberalisation and persistent governance and human rights challenges. The EU's approach, particularly post-Arab Spring, highlights the tension between its strategic priorities and normative commitments. The EU's discourse around democracy and human rights in Jordan has historically been ambitious, aligning with broader European Neighbourhood Policy objectives of fostering democratic governance. However, the actual practice has been more restrained, as the EU has often prioritised stability, especially in light of regional turmoil following the Arab Spring (Jonasson & Mezagopian, 2017). Compared to the widespread unrest in neighbouring states, Jordan's relative stability has positioned the country as a key strategic partner. The EU, while continuing to promote political reforms, has moderated its demands, often prioritising security concerns and regional stability over rapid democratisation. Jordan's monarchy, under King Abdullah II, has enacted several reforms, including constitutional amendments and efforts to enhance civil society. However, these reforms have often been criticised as piecemeal and insufficient. Critics argue that the EU's engagement lacks sufficient pressure for deeper political reforms, such as expanding parliamentary powers or enhancing judicial independence. Instead, the EU has supported a gradualist approach, reflecting concerns that more aggressive political changes could destabilise the monarchy, especially given the proximity of conflicts in Syria and Iraq (Seeberg, 2016). While understandable from a strategic perspective, this cautious approach raises questions about the EU's genuine commitment to fostering meaningful political liberalisation in Jordan.

Migration management and security have become central pillars of EU-Jordan relations, particularly in the aftermath of the Syrian refugee crisis. The 2016 Jordan Compact exemplifies this focus, linking trade concessions with Jordan's commitment to integrating Syrian refugees into its labour market (Seeberg, 2016). The Compact, while innovative, has faced significant challenges. Many Syrian refugees remain outside the formal labour market due to legal restrictions and competition with local workers. Moreover, critics argue that the EU's reliance on Jordan to manage such a large refugee population externalises Europe's own migration responsibilities without addressing the root causes of displacement. Security cooperation, especially in the context of counterterrorism, further underscores the EU's prioritisation of stability. Jordan's strategic location, bordering conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, has made it an indispensable partner in regional security initiatives. Consequently, the EU has provided the country with significant financial and technical

support for border management and counterterrorism efforts. However, similarly to Egypt, this focus on security has drawn criticism for overshadowing the EU's commitment to promoting democratic governance. By prioritising security cooperation, there is a risk of reinforcing authoritarian practices in Jordan, particularly in the realm of surveillance and suppression of dissent.

Economic cooperation between the EU and Jordan is another critical aspect of their relationship. However, it remains heavily reliant on EU financial assistance as Jordan's economy faces profound structural challenges, including high unemployment, limited natural resources, and a significant public debt burden. The ongoing Syrian refugee crisis has only exacerbated these issues, further straining Jordan's fragile economy. While the EU has provided substantial financial aid, including through the Jordan Compact, these efforts have not fully addressed the deeper structural problems impeding long-term economic growth (Metwally, 2004). Similarly, the EU-Jordan Association Agreement, which has been in force since 2002, has facilitated trade liberalisation. However, Jordan's exports to the EU remain limited due to barriers such as insufficient industrial capacity and regulatory challenges. While crucial, the EU's financial support has been criticised for focusing too heavily on immediate economic stabilisation rather than addressing the root causes of Jordan's economic stagnation.

The increasing informalization of EU-Jordan relations, particularly in the realm of migration governance, has marked a shift in the EU's approach (Seeberg & Zardo, 2023). Rather than relying solely on formal agreements, such as the Association Agreement, the EU has turned to more flexible, informal mechanisms like the Jordan Compact. This shift reflects broader trends in EU migration governance, where securitisation has become a dominant narrative. The EU's emphasis on migration control, framed within the context of security threats, has led to a more transactional relationship with Jordan, where stability and migration management take precedence over deeper political reforms. This formalisation has been both a response to the challenges posed by the refugee crisis and a strategic adaptation to the complexities of the MENA region. However, it has also raised concerns about the EU's commitment to its normative goals. Again, by focusing on short-term security gains, the EU risks undermining its long-term objectives of promoting democratic governance and human rights. The Jordan Compact, for example, while addressing immediate migration challenges, has been criticised for failing to provide sustainable solutions for both Syrian refugees and Jordan's broader economic challenges.

The historical trajectory of EU development policies towards the Southern Neighbourhood is a complex narrative that reveals both the evolution of the EU's approach and the persistent challenges that have hindered its effectiveness, exemplified by the cases of Egypt and Jordan. From the trade-

centric policies of the Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) to the more holistic but often inconsistent Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU has continually sought to refine its engagement with the region. Each framework introduced new mechanisms for cooperation and development yet struggled with issues of coordination, policy coherence, and the unique implementation challenges posed by the political and socio-economic dynamics of the MENA region. The introduction of the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) in 2021, whose effects are yet to be explored, reflects the EU's most recent and ambitious attempt to overcome these historical obstacles. In the following sections, this contribution will carry out an in-depth analysis of the NDICI-Global Europe framework, specifically evaluating its potential to bridge the efficacy gap in EU development policies through improved coordination and coherence. It will also assess the extent to which NDICI's design offers solutions to the long-standing challenges identified in the EU's previous engagements with the Southern Neighbourhood.

Section IV - NDICI-Global Europe: Coordination and Coherence Issues

“Our new comprehensive instrument underpins the EU's external action and enables us to be a leading global player and a reliable partner in the international scene, supporting our multilateral agenda. It gives us the flexibility needed to respond faster and in a more coherent way to ongoing and emerging global challenges, while supporting global priorities such as peace and stability, good governance, trade and inclusive and sustainable growth. This is what the world is expecting from the EU, and we deliver it.” - The HRVP Josep Borrell ([Commission, 2021](#))

As mentioned above, NDICI-Global Europe represents the European Union's latest advancement in bolstering its strategic international presence and improving the quality of its development efforts. This section examines how its design substantially improves internal coordination and policy coherence.

Coordination

The greatest innovation introduced through NDICI-GE is undoubtedly streamlining multiple financial instruments under a unified framework. This structural overhaul was designed to simplify European development policy funding mechanisms and procedures, ensuring a more efficient architecture for resource allocation and action programming (Commission, 2018). Consequently, the European Development Fund (EDF), the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), the Partnership Instrument (PI), the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation (INSC), the External Lending Mandate (ELM), the Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA), the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD), and the Guarantee Fund for External Actions (EAG) have all been integrated under NDICI-GE. Having a unique rationale for development cooperation efforts allows for the simplification and rationalisation of management and oversight systems and reduces the administrative burden for EU institutions and Member States as well as for partner countries. Similarly, actions that receive cumulative funding from different Union programmes shall be audited only once, covering all involved programmes and their respective applicable rules (ECA, 2023). Moreover, the budgetisation of the previously intergovernmental EDF constitutes a notable innovation, diminishing Member States' influence over program design and funding, thus facilitating more coordinated policies and swifter adoption procedures.

Enhanced coordination also benefits from several structural innovations within governance frameworks. Noteworthy among these is the establishment of a biannual high-level geopolitical dialogue between the European Parliament, the High Representative, and relevant external action commissioners. This dialogue gives the Parliament an unprecedented opportunity to offer strategic guidance throughout the process, share concerns, and suggest future directions. This complements the already institutionalised regular exchanges between the Commission and the Council within the NDICI group, which is equally critical in steering and coordination. In addition to the NDICI committees replacing ENI ones, a specific governance setting is envisaged for the new European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+), encompassing a strategic board and an operational board that includes representatives from the European Commission, the High Representative, all EU Member States, and the European Investment Bank (EIB). Ongoing discussions suggest that observer status may be extended to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and European Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) alongside the Parliament (Sergejeff et al., 2022). This would provide another space for dialogue and coordination among EU financial players.

Similarly, the instrument's three-pillar structure significantly favours coordination. The geographic, thematic, and rapid response pillars, along with a reserve cushion, form a robust framework that can effectively tackle a wide range of global issues. These pillars are organised hierarchically, with geographic programs comprising most of NDICI-Global Europe's budget, supplemented by thematic programs. The rapid response pillar and reserve further augment this structure, creating a comprehensive and layered framework for development and emergency interventions. The geographic pillar, comprising 75% of the total budget (€60.39 billion), allocates financial resources to various global regions, with the EU Neighbourhoods and sub-Saharan Africa being the key focus areas, receiving €19.3 billion and €29.2 billion, respectively. Meanwhile, the thematic pillar focuses on issues like human rights and democracy, civil society, stability and peace, and global challenges, supplementing geographic programs by addressing matters tackled more effectively on a global scale. Although it builds on previous EU thematic instruments and initiatives, its funding has been reduced (€6.36 billion), reflecting a shift towards prioritising EU cooperation at the country or regional level. The €3.2 billion rapid response pillar is a flexible, non-programmable fund designed to swiftly address crises, conflicts, and instability, effectively replacing the former Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP). This pillar underscores the interconnectedness of security interventions, humanitarian aid, and development assistance to implement the triple nexus (Howe, 2019). Finally, the cushion, representing around 11% of the total budget (about €9 billion), serves as a safety net that enables the European Commission to deal with unanticipated events, new,

foreign, or Union-led projects, as well as emerging challenges. It may supplement and support projects and activities across all three pillars, guaranteeing the EU's dynamic response to global developments⁴.

This structure endows the EU strategy for development cooperation with an essential degree of flexibility, addressing one of the primary challenges of the previous architecture. The organisation of actions and funds along three complementary pillars already enhances agility, a capability further reinforced by the organisation of Multiannual Indicative Programs (MIPs) around priority areas rather than traditional focal sectors. Indeed, this approach facilitates interlinked responses and more effective use of synergies.

Regarding policy framework, NDICI-Global Europe integrates key policy documents at the EU level, including the EU Global Strategy and the New European Consensus on Development. These documents provide a strategic direction that guides the EU's external actions, including its development initiatives. By anchoring its operations in these strategic documents, NDICI-Global Europe ensures its actions consistently align with the EU's goals. Moreover, the instrument is implemented following the general framework of Association Agreements, Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, Multilateral Agreements, and other legally binding agreements with partner countries (Art 7, Reg. 2021/947). This framework also incorporates the European Council's and the Council's conclusions, summit declarations, high-level meetings with partner countries, relevant European Parliament resolutions, and communications from the Commission and the High Representative (COM, 2018).

Another main concern associated with the effectiveness of EU actions is the coordination with Member States' agendas. Indeed, development policies fall under shared competence, allowing both MSs and the EU to bring forward their development programmes almost individually. In this regard, NDICI-GE's design is poised to boost coordination between the two frameworks of action thanks to the Team Europe Initiative (TEIs) that complement it. Initially established to coordinate the Union's actions with those of Member States in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Team Europe Approach is now increasingly applied within EU development policies (Jones & Teevan, 2021). TEIs are intended to be high-profile and recognisable European flagship initiatives, focusing on areas where the EU and its Member States can achieve the greatest collective impact at national, regional, and global levels. Their integration into the NDICI is seen as one of its most notable innovations. At the national level, TEIs are flexible and tailored to local needs, with EU delegations, Member States, and

⁴ However, by July 2023, 80% of the cushion budget had already been used to tackle the disruptions of COVID-19, the Syrian refugee crisis and to support Ukraine.

European financial institutions collaborating on their design (Hodson & Howarth, 2023). Regionally, TEIs are developed at the EU headquarters, facilitating broader participation from Team Europe members, including those not physically present in certain countries. This approach highly resonates with NDICI-Global Europe and the Global Gateway (EC. n.d.) promotion of ‘working better together’, notably through joint programming, implementation, and monitoring of development cooperation between the EU and its Member States to ensure greater coordination and avoid overlaps.

NDICI-Global Europe has also been positively received due to its integrated financial architecture for external investment. The European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) and the External Action Guarantee (EAG) aim at mobilising public and private sector investments that have recently gained increasing importance in the new EU strategy for development action and addressing market failures and sub-optimal investment situations (Bilal, 2019). Under the NDICI-Global Europe regulation, the EU can offer guarantees through EFSD+ up to €53.5 billion between 2021 and 2027, potentially leveraging up to €0.5 trillion in investments (COM, 2020). Furthermore, in June 2021, conclusions were adopted by the Council on enhancing the EU’s financial architecture for development (CoEU, 2021). This initiative aims to optimise the diverse array of European actors and instruments to reinforce the coordination between European financial institutions for development, notably the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Central to this strategy is the provision of blended finance and guarantees through those development financial institutions that adhere to the EU's stringent budgetary regulations.

Introducing private financing and cooperation with external financial institutions under NDICI-GE is crucial to address the capability-expectation gap related to funding. Although EU grants play a strategic role in attracting foreign investment and serve as a guarantee to facilitate complex, high-risk investments, the EU budget alone is insufficient to fully implement effective actions abroad or achieve its external policy's ambitious goals. Indeed, should the EU seek to elevate its geopolitical and geo-economic influence, it would be imperative to present a unified position within multilateral financial international fora (Bilal, 2019). This requires increased coordination between the Union and its Member States outside the EU budget and closer relations with third countries’ business sectors (ibid).

Concrete examples of the effectiveness of this approach are already there. An interviewee from DG NEAR Jordan's desk shared his positive assessment of this practice, which allowed the team to mobilise, under a TEI⁵, a significant amount of funds to finance a water management project, one

⁵ “Jordan - Sustainable Water Management”

of the country's main issues. According to him, the “power” of this approach lies not only in the increased funds but also in the external perception of a unified European front committed to the cause.

Coherence

The drivers of the efficacy gap from the EU side are not limited to the multi-governance and coordination issues addressed above. Instead, the EU's development policies also suffer from a wide rhetoric-practice gap, reflected in the mismatch between what the EU says and what it does. Specific to the Southern Neighbourhood, the discourse surrounding EU relations with the region has been essentially normative for a long time – as outlined in Section III. The EU has positioned itself as the upholder of liberal-democratic values, which it was committed to spreading in its neighbouring countries. As Balfour and Schmid (2011) argue, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) expectations were already based on the EU's normative identity and the assumption that the Southern Neighbourhood countries would aspire to align with EU standards. However, the increasing politicisation of its external action soon resulted in the prioritisation of its strategic interests over its value-sharing mission. This trend, evident in the broader EU foreign policy, was accompanied by rising criticism accusing the Union of losing its original nature and of great incoherence (e.g. Pace, 2009). Therefore, as part of its efforts to increase the effectiveness of its external action, the EU's new approach embraces increased transparency and clearness. Indeed, with NDICI-GE and the Global Gateway more broadly, the EU departs from the normative rhetoric to embrace a bolder and more transparent presentation of its interests. This amplifies the ‘principled pragmatism’ approach introduced by the Global Strategy as the new rationale for EU external action, which balances a realistic approach with an idealistic aspiration to create a better world (Bremberg, 2020). Therefore, the new logic is reverted. Shifting from earlier programming exercises and agreements that prioritised the needs and priorities of partner countries, the NDICI programming process has been shaped by a more prominent political emphasis on EU values and interests. The EU now sets its priorities for each partner country before identifying potential areas of alignment with the partner country's demands. While this new approach may sound conflicting with the EU's normative primary nature, it allows for greater clarity, reducing the discrepancies between rhetoric and practice in EU external actions and the high levels of incoherence perceived by third countries and the international community at large (Sabourin et al., 2023).

This new line of action, as reflected in the 'policy first' principle leading the new strategy, is a testament to the EU's commitment to strategic efficiency. According to this principle, the EU's external action should be driven by the EU and its partner countries' policy priorities rather than by

funding instruments. This shift is intended to foster more robust political and policy dialogue on issues such as digital governance, climate change, gender equality, and security—areas of mutual interest—thereby enhancing the EU's strategic efficiency (Di Ciommo & Sergejeff, 2021).

Specifically, “policy first” is only one of the four cardinal principles guiding the NDICI-GE, alongside geographisation, partnership and an integrated approach. The geographisation principle, reflected in the large allocation of funds to the geographic pillar, emphasises bilateral cooperation with partner countries and regions, thereby localising and supporting activities while advancing EU national, regional, and global priorities (Jones & Keijzer, 2021). The partnership principle echoes the EU's commitment to build long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships with a diverse array of international and local actors. NDICI-Global Europe allocates a minimum of €500 million to enhance the role of local and regional governments in designing EU development programs (Platforma, 2021). Lastly, the integrated approach principle seeks to consolidate various areas of EU external action and the external dimension of EU internal policies. It aims to address interlinkages between the SDGs, promoting integrated actions that achieve multiple objectives simultaneously (Di Ciommo & Jones, 2019). Indeed, NDICI-GE embodies a consolidated framework that aligns with and actively promotes the broader objectives and standards set forth by major international agreements and the EU's strategic directives. Key to the instrument's framework is its incorporation of overarching international agreements, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement, that steer global efforts towards increased interlinkages between policy areas and a more collaborative approach to development.

Aligning with these global frameworks enhances the effective use of resources by ensuring that EU development aid is closely aligned with the priorities and systems of partner countries. It also facilitates the pooling and leveraging of resources from different EU instruments and programs, thereby amplifying the relevance and impact of the aid provided (Brand et al., 2021). This strategic approach enables the EU to address complex, cross-cutting challenges more efficiently, ensuring that resources from various initiatives contribute towards common goals, thus enhancing the synergistic effects and overall impact of EU development policies.

In its quest for enhanced policy coherence, NDICI-Global Europe's regulation establishes specific horizontal cross-cutting priorities for thematic areas (Sabourin & Jones, 2023). These spending targets mandate a coordinated, holistic, and structured approach: at least 20% of funds are allocated for human development, 30% for climate change initiatives, approximately 10% for the governance of migration and forced displacement, including actions targeting the root causes of these issues, and at least 85% of actions must have gender equality as a principal or significant objective.

Additionally, at least 93% of the funding within the new instrument should be reportable as Official Development Assistance, contributing to the EU's commitment to allocating 0.7% of its collective GDP to Official Development Assistance and 0.2% to the least developed countries.

Section V - NDICI-Global Europe: Implementation Issues in the Southern Neighbourhood

In line with previous cooperation frameworks, NDICI-Global Europe maintains a unique approach to its relationships with neighbouring regions, treating them separately from other areas. The financial support directed towards geographical programs in the Neighbourhood preserves and amplifies key principles from earlier strategies. These include the performance-based approach ('more for more'), which incentivises the implementation of mutually agreed political and economic reforms, and the differentiation-based approach, which tailors support to individual countries' specific circumstances and needs. The criteria for funding allocations within the Neighbourhood are, therefore, uniquely delineated in a separate legal provision (Art. 19, Reg. 2021/947). These include the partner country's needs based on population and development level indicators; the partner's commitment to agreed political, economic, and social reforms and progress in implementation; the country's dedication to building a sustainable democracy and progress in this process; the ambition level of the partnership with the Union; and the absorption capacity and potential impact of Union support.

These criteria blend quantitative and qualitative considerations, crafting a comprehensive evaluative framework that underscores the EU's prioritisation of this region. Nevertheless, the EU's development initiatives in the Southern Neighbourhood are consistently plagued by inefficiencies that cannot be solely attributed to coordination issues at the EU level nor to the divergences between discourse and action. Instead, the root causes of the ineffectiveness of EU development policies are often found on the other side of the Mediterranean, where the implementation process is influenced by a myriad of region- and country-specific factors. Accordingly, drawing from relevant literature and data collected through semi-structured interviews, this section identifies some of the most prevalent obstacles to the smooth implementation of policies in the Southern Neighbourhood, with specific references to Egypt and Jordan. Then, the analysis explains how and to what extent NDICI-Global Europe's rationale and design novelties can contribute to overcoming such difficulties.

One of the initial challenges the EU faces in its engagements with the Southern Neighbourhood is rooted in the perceptions of the region's governing institutions and populations about the EU. These countries have diverse historical and cultural backgrounds, with notably different experiences in their interactions with European powers. Particularly in the Maghreb countries, where the colonial past was especially intense, there tends to be a perception that aligns with what Del Sarto (2016) describes

as "Empire Europe." This historical context can lead to deep-seated mistrust and hesitancy to cooperate. Indeed, EU officials stationed in various delegations frequently encounter obstacles when attempting to forge trust-based relationships with both governmental and civil society representatives. These relationships are crucial for effectively addressing and negotiating sensitive issues such as human rights and democratic reforms; however, they are often volatile. For instance, governmental changes, such as the recent reshuffling of ministerial officials in Egypt, as reported by an interviewee, can disrupt ongoing efforts and force EU representatives to initiate trust-building processes repeatedly.

However, trust issues are two-sided. While partner countries may exhibit reluctance towards the EU, the Union exercises caution in delegating responsibilities to local administrations and civil society organisations (CSOs). The predominant concern stems from the governance structures in these countries, often authoritarian regimes or monarchies, which exert tight control over local CSOs, compromising their independence and reliability. For instance, in 2016, the Egyptian parliament enacted a highly restrictive NGO law that places civil society under strict government oversight and significantly hampers the activities of human rights organisations (Voltolini & Colombo, 2020). The EU primarily worries that this dependency or "affiliation" might lead to a diminished commitment on the part of these organisations, prompting the Union to frequently avoid relying on them to implement its programs. Local CSOs are significantly affected by low-capacity levels, which increase their vulnerability to external pressures from governmental bodies, funders, or other powerful stakeholders. This, in turn, compromises their autonomy and effectiveness, further constraining their operational scope. Indeed, these organisations often struggle with limited human, financial, and technical resources, which are crucial for managing and executing complex projects. The resulting insufficient capacity leads to delays in project timelines, reduced scope of activities, and, ultimately, diminished impact. Moreover, the lack of robust organisational capacity drastically hinders their influence in the planning stages of development projects, preventing these organisations from contributing their local knowledge and expertise and impeding their ability to advocate for the communities they represent. Consequently, projects may not be as well-tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the local populations, leading to less effective implementation practices.

Capacity-related problems are not limited to the resulting shrinking space of local CSOs. Governments within the Southern Neighbourhood also show low levels of accountability, transparency and ability to enforce public policies, challenging EU commitment to the principle of local ownership. For example, an interviewee from the EU delegation in Cairo highlighted the Egyptian government's ministerial structure as confusing and disorganised, thereby severely

hampering the implementation processes that necessitate effective communication and coordination between EU officials and local stakeholders. Particularly problematic in Cairo is the delay in obtaining governmental clearances or specific documentation. Instances were reported where authorisations requested over a year prior remained unresolved.

While low administrative capacity significantly detracts from the effectiveness of cooperation, the latter is also subject to the willingness of authoritarian regimes, which are generally reluctant to collaborate on sensitive issues and may deliberately slow down the process of granting clearances to stall the implementation of certain action plans. This reluctance was corroborated by a representative from DG NEAR, who noted that such obstacles are not confined to clearances but also include other types of authorisations, such as those related to travel. There have been instances where travel permissions for entering or leaving the country were not granted, thereby preventing EU experts from accessing the region and local authorities or CSO representatives from attending crucial meetings in Brussels. The representative remarked, “Whenever the topic is not aligned with the government's agenda, it is possible that the authorisation is not granted.” This practice severely undermines the inclusivity of discussions and challenges the EU’s commitment to fostering genuine partnerships rather than maintaining traditional donor-recipient dynamics.

Considering the abovementioned factors as obstacles to a smooth and efficient policy implementation process, NDICI-GE's ability to tackle these challenges appears somewhat limited. Regarding CSOs, the EU recognises these organisations' critical role in accessing the more isolated segments of local populations and their deep understanding of the country's hidden dynamics. Therefore, it has proactively developed action plans to enhance local organisations’ administrative capabilities per the resilience-building principle. These plans focus on improving their capacity to manage substantial financial resources, which is currently markedly deficient, and would increase their chances of being actively involved in the implementation phase. Despite these initiatives, the results revealed through interviews indicate that the impact of such capacity-building efforts tends to yield only temporary enhancements. While CSOs may demonstrate improved capabilities to execute specific actions in the short term, achieving sustained long-term improvements remains a significant challenge.

Nonetheless, with the introduction of NDICI-Global Europe, the EU has intensified its commitment to inclusivity by incorporating third countries throughout the policy development process more thoroughly, achieving slightly better outcomes in their integration during the programming phase. This process begins with a year-long 'pre-programming' step, during which EU institutions and delegations engage in extensive analytical work and consultations with local

stakeholders. These efforts delineate the EU's strategic interests and define priorities for cooperation with partner countries. The identified priorities and corresponding financial allocations for 2021-2027 are then encapsulated in regional and country-specific Multiannual Indicative Programs (MIPs). These MIPs are drafted by EU delegations, ratified at EU headquarters, and formally approved by the EU Member States, followed by the adoption of corresponding annual action plans and financing decisions. This shows NDICI's renewed commitment to favour a more efficient alignment of EU interests with those of the partner countries through enhanced involvement of EU delegations, whose direct, in-depth understanding of local needs and specificities allows for more informed and context-driven policy design. However, time issues mitigate improvements in the policy process's inclusivity. The process from design to adoption to actual implementation of these plans spans at least two years, a timeline that hampers the EU's ability to be perceived as effective. This is even more problematic concerning the Southern Neighbourhood – a region subject to persistent instability and high levels of volatility, which, therefore, requires increasingly agile programming and implementation procedures that can adapt to changing priorities and situations on the ground.

However, in terms of flexibility, NDICI-GE does bring some interesting novelties, which not only concern a more flexible allocation of funds but, more importantly, increased adaptability to local contexts through diversified funding management mechanisms. According to Article 26 of the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation, there are two major “methods of cooperation” or management modes. Financing under the instrument can be implemented “either directly by the Commission, by EUDs or by executive agencies, or indirectly through any of the entities listed in the Financial Regulation.” In contrast with the previous EDF funding management mechanism, relying almost exclusively on National Authorizing Officers (NAOs) and prioritising grants and projects, NDICI offers a more diversified portfolio of funding options, including loans, blending, and EFSD+ guarantees (Sabourin et al., 2023). This allows the EU to choose the most appropriate management mechanism according to the partner country's peculiarities.

In Egypt, for example, where CSOs' capacity is problematically limited, data from the [MIPs](#) show that most financing is granted through indirect management. According to Financial Regulation (Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046), funds can be managed indirectly by entrusting budget implementation tasks to third countries or their designated bodies, international organisations and their agencies, the European Investment Bank (EIB) or European Investment Fund (EIF) together known as the EIB group, and various Union bodies. Public law bodies, private law bodies with a public service mission (e.g. Member State organisations), entities involved in public-private

partnerships, and those handling specific actions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) can also be entrusted, provided they offer sufficient financial guarantees.

This implies that the EU renounces full control over implementation but reduces the administrative burden of managing huge sums. However, this also implies less room for local CSOs to play an active part in implementing the actions as, through indirect management, they compete with other institutions to get grants (CONCORD, 2023).

Insights from Jordan highlight a distinctive approach to funding allocation, with approximately 50% of funds being channelled through budget support. This method suggests a strategic preference by the EU to bolster and enhance existing national strategies rather than introducing and enforcing entirely new strategic frameworks. Such an approach aligns closely with the EU's broader objective of transitioning away from the traditional donor-recipient model towards a more collaborative partnership paradigm. By supporting initiatives that are already priorities for the local government, the EU significantly mitigates the risks of misperceptions or resistance from the partner country. This strategy fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility within the partner country and enhances the likelihood of successful and sustainable outcomes. Indeed, this approach is very much in line with the premises of the new instrument, which maintains a deep rhetorical commitment to local ownership. However, this is not the norm, as is evident from the mere comparison between the two countries. It can be employed only in favourable contexts with sufficient state capacity, mutual trust and significant governmental cooperation.

Apart from increased flexibility in funding management, NDICI's transformative impact on country-specific implementation challenges remains limited. The instrument advocates for greater participation of local CSOs in the programming and implementation phases. However, it falls short of ensuring consistent and high-quality communication with these organisations regarding the progression of actions, results achieved, and other critical updates, undermining the EU's commitment to transparency and inclusiveness (CONCORD, 2023). Similarly, NDICI promotes the empowerment of EU delegations in third countries, resulting in a more proactive role in diplomacy and advocacy to align EU interests with those of the partner countries more effectively and to foster mutual understanding and cooperation on shared challenges. However, the potential benefits of this commitment are long-term and not forcefully ascribable to the instrument itself. Moreover, the positive import of increased involvement of financial institutions and the private sector, as NDICI advocates, could skew benefits away from areas critical for building resilience and sustainable development but lack obvious investment appeal, such as democratic transition and human rights promotion (Gavas & Pleeck, 2021).

Perhaps more importantly, NDICI does not signify a fundamental shift in the underlying rationale of EU development policies. It represents another EU-centred structural reform that improves the framework for policy creation and management at the EU level without substantially altering the foundational paradigm (Saviolo, 2023). While the EU continues to promote the development of resilient and high-capacity local administrations, democratic institutions, and equitable partnerships, its track record in actualising these goals remains inconsistent. The situation in Egypt exemplifies how EU commitments to these foundational aspects of development cooperation can be compromised by overriding geopolitical interests. When energy, migration or security-related issues conflict with the stated development goals, the EU's dedication often wavers, leading to an approach favouring modest achievements over the pursuit of profound transformative change (Berger, 2022).

In essence, the analysis of the structure and implementation mechanisms of NDICI illustrate a broader issue within EU development policy. While newly introduced frameworks are well-suited to improve policy management at the EU level, they do not fundamentally alter the dynamics that contribute to the efficacy gap on the ground. Indeed, the European Union's lack of strategic autonomy substantially constrains its ability to effectuate the transformative changes it ostensibly aims to achieve within this pivotal region, thereby undermining the perceived effectiveness of its development initiatives. More specifically, the absence of a unified strategic posture, as well as its reliance on strategic partnerships for security, migration and energy matters, hamper the EU's efforts to implement policies that require a strong and autonomous stance. As a result, despite substantial investments and well-intentioned programs, the EU often struggles to realise its ambitious objectives, leading to a discrepancy between expected and actual outcomes. This efficacy gap not only diminishes the impact of its development efforts but also affects the EU's credibility as a global actor committed to promoting stability, democracy, and sustainable development.

Therefore, in line with the “principled pragmatism” approach articulated in the EU Global Strategy, it becomes imperative for the Union to increase its awareness of the objective limitations of its leverage in countries like Egypt and Jordan. By acknowledging these limitations, the EU can recalibrate its strategies to set more attainable and context-specific goals. Ultimately, such a strategy not only improves the efficacy of EU policies but also strengthens partnerships with countries in the Southern Neighbourhood, contributing to greater stability and mutual prosperity in the long term.

Conclusion

The Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe marks a significant evolution in the European Union's strategy to improve its development cooperation efforts and enhance its international influence. As the financial instrument of the new European strategy, NDICI aims to improve the effectiveness of development policies by reorganising the financial architecture and simplifying the procedures for aid provision. This preliminary examination of the instrument's potential to effectively address long-standing implementation challenges in EU development policy toward the Southern Neighbourhood has highlighted both its strengths and persistent shortcomings. Specifically, this contribution focused on the instrument's ability to bridge the gap between set objectives and concrete outcomes of development policies, i.e. the efficacy gap. To this end, it evaluated the instrument's design and mechanisms, considering the complex evolution of EU relations with these countries, persistent EU-level coordination issues and the intricate socio-political dynamics of the target region, which significantly influence the implementation of EU policies.

This analysis ultimately concludes that NDICI-Global Europe does have the potential to contribute to bridging the gap between objectives and outcomes in EU development policies, improving internal coordination, enhancing policy coherence and allowing for greater adaptability to local conditions. However, the instrument is far more suited to address EU-level deficiencies rather than to provide valuable solutions to the on-the-ground implementation component of the efficacy gap. This is because the novelties proposed by NDICI-GE are mostly related to the architecture of EU development cooperation rather than to the underlying paradigm guiding it. Therefore, the instrument's contribution to overcoming implementation hurdles is limited to its renewed commitment to symmetrical partnerships and increased flexibility in funding management and employment.

Indeed, with its consolidated budget and streamlined approach, NDICI is well-suited for eliminating redundancies and simplifying budgeting and planning. Its hierarchical three-pillar structure ensures that funds can be rapidly deployed where most needed, therefore improving the EU's responsiveness to global and regional challenges. Beyond the clear advantages of consolidating eleven financing instruments, NDICI's structure introduces significant enhancements in both coordination and coherence. These span from the increased democratic scrutiny and interinstitutional coordination given by the European Parliament's involvement in regular consultations with the

Commission to the enhanced policy coherence ensured by cross-cutting priorities and the universal principles permeating the instrument's rationale. Notably, NDICI reinvigorates the EU commitment to coordination with Member States through the inclusion of Team Europe Initiatives in regional and country-specific MIPs, and it promotes increased involvement of the private and banking sectors, contributing to reducing the capability-expectations gap related to underfunding issues. Crucially, NDICI introduces a whole set of funding management options, which allow for increased adaptability to local conditions.

While these structural innovations represent significant strides toward a more unified and strategic EU external policy, the realities on the ground in regions like the Southern Neighbourhood complicate this ideal. The intricate socio-political landscapes of these areas require tailored approaches that NDICI sometimes struggles to accommodate fully. Despite aiming for better alignment of EU priorities with local needs through a participatory planning process, the reality of implementing these well-intentioned policies often falls short of expectations, so much so that the efficacy gap remains a significant challenge. Indeed, several local factors affect the outcome of EU policies in regions like Egypt and Jordan, which have been subject to careful observation. These factors include the capacity levels of local civil society organisations (CSOs), the governance structures of the partner countries, and the local perceptions of EU intentions. The deep-seated mistrust and hesitancy to cooperate in areas where the colonial past is a sensitive subject are exacerbated by restrictive local laws and the authoritarian nature of most regimes. The latter often exert tight control over local CSOs, compromising their independence and reliability. Such dynamics make it challenging for the EU to rely on these organisations to implement its programs effectively, therefore undermining their full involvement.

Indeed, the implementation of NDICI-GE itself reveals that while there is an acknowledgement of the need for local ownership and capacity building, actual practices often fall short. The capacity-building efforts, although well-intentioned, tend to yield only temporary improvements in CSOs' abilities to manage projects and funds, while long-term improvements in local administrative capabilities remain elusive. Moreover, NDICI-GE's attempts to improve the tailoring of its policy development processes by incorporating third countries more thoroughly in the programming phase signify a positive shift towards more integrated planning. However, the slow process from design to actual implementation, often taking at least two years, limits the instrument's ability to respond agilely to the dynamic needs of the Southern Neighbourhood.

Thus, while NDICI-GE presents a significant advancement in terms of inter-institutional coordination and policy coherence, these improvements alone are insufficient to bridge the gap

between objectives and outcomes. Indeed, the latter highly depends on implementation challenges that NDICI is not entirely fit to address. The persistence of these challenges underscores the necessity for a more profound reevaluation of the EU's strategies, particularly in ensuring that the rhetoric surrounding resilience-building and local ownership translates into meaningful and impactful actions on the ground. Hence, as we look to the future, realising NDICI's full potential hinges on the EU's willingness to embrace profound structural and procedural changes. These would have to start with increased dialogue and high-quality communication, which have proved to be the most powerful tools in the EU's hands. Fostering stronger partnerships with local governments and civil society organisations also implies significant commitments to knowledge sharing, capacity building, and technical support to empower local entities to lead their development agendas effectively. Moreover, comprehensive and ongoing evaluations must be implemented to dynamically adjust strategies in real-time, ensuring they remain aligned with both local needs and broader geopolitical objectives.

However, beyond structural adjustments, actual effectiveness will require reevaluating how the EU conceptualises and engages with its external environment. Given the lack of EU strategic autonomy and the existing interdependencies with the Southern Neighbourhood, this would imply a recalibration of the scope of EU actions to the objective limitations of its leverage, embracing a more concrete endorsement of the “principled pragmatism” paradigm.

Ultimately, this ongoing journey demands unwavering commitment and bold creativity to devise more innovative and effective development policies that transform into tangible realities.

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Appendix I

Interview 1: DG NEAR official from Egypt's desk

Questions:

1. What's the most effective tool for democratic development? How do you measure success? What are the indicators?
2. How would you evaluate the overall EU commitment to the promotion of democracy? How instrumental is it?
3. What are the main challenges to democratic development in the region? Are there any specificities for Egypt?
4. Do you see the NDICI as a turning point in EU development policies in terms of coherence and effectiveness? In what way this is different from the past?
5. Do you think the instrument can or cannot enchain a democratic change? Is it fit for purpose?
6. What are the (strengths) and weaknesses of the instrument?
7. How does the governance of the instrument (contested) influence the efficacy gap? Who does what?
8. What do you think will be the main outcomes (achievements) of the new financial framework in the Southern Neighbourhood? And in Egypt?
9. Does the geographisation logic really ensure a more tailored approach? To the local situations (including state capacity, quality of governance, human rights respect)
10. Is the allocated budget enough for the targets? Are these realistic?
11. What do you think about the "policy first" approach? Will this make EU-Neighbourhood relations more or less asymmetrical?
12. Who decided the national priorities to be brought to the negotiation table? Do you think they reflect what people want?
13. Which are the main local stakeholders involved? Have they been involved in both the joint programming and implementation phases?
14. How has the instrument been perceived locally? Is it true that EU delegations are more directly involved?
15. Which local factors influence the success of policies the most? (State capacity, infrastructure, political will, etc.)
16. How much of the efficacy gap is expected considering the complexity of democratic development, and how much of it is actually due to implementation problems, lack of funds, etc.?

Interview 2: DG NEAR official from the Good Governance and Security Team for the Southern Neighbourhood

Questions:

1. In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle to the success of European development policies?
2. Based on your experience, do you think the problem is more related to funding and resources or to how these are used?
3. In your view, do internal coordination problems or obstacles encountered in partner countries have a greater impact on the success of development policies?
4. What are the main obstacles to the implementation of European development policies in the Southern Neighbourhood countries?
5. How has the European Union's approach changed through NDICI?
6. What are the most significant improvements introduced by this instrument?
7. How does NDICI contribute to improving internal (inter-institutional) cooperation? Which institutions are involved in regional programs, and in what way?
8. How is the work divided between the Commission and the EEAS?
9. How are EU development policies coordinated with those of the Member States?
10. To what extent does the type of government/regime in Southern Neighbourhood countries influence the design of development policies, and how does this impact their implementation? Could you provide examples from different Neighbourhood countries?
11. Has shifting the EU's approach from imposing its policies to contributing to national strategies led to better results?
12. Have there already been any feedback from partner countries on the action plans from previous years or on the new approach?
13. When considering the characteristics of individual third countries, which aspect is given the most attention in designing the relevant development policies?
14. What are the key steps in the EU's efforts to bridge the efficacy gap in its development policy?
15. How has the EU improved in designing more tailored policies for partner countries?
16. In your opinion, how much does treating countries as partners rather than recipients by involving them in the action-planning process help bridge the gap between expectations and results?

Interview 3: Official from the EU delegation to Cairo

Questions:

1. In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle to the success of European development policies?
2. Based on your experience, is the problem more related to funds and resources or to how they are employed?
3. In your view, do internal coordination problems weigh more, or do the obstacles encountered in partner countries play a larger role in determining the success of development policies?
4. In your opinion, what have been the main steps in the EU's effort to bridge the efficacy gap in its development policy?
5. How has the EU improved in designing more tailored policies for partner countries?
6. How much does considering countries as partners rather than recipients and involving them in the action programming process contribute, in your opinion, to bridging the gap between expectations and results?
7. What are the main obstacles to the implementation of European development policies in the Southern Neighbourhood countries, particularly in Egypt?
8. How has the democratic situation in Egypt improved thanks to European policies? In your opinion, what is the most effective tool to contribute to the country's democratic development?
9. How has the EU's approach changed through NDICI?
10. What are the most significant improvements brought by the instrument?
11. How does NDICI contribute to improving internal (inter-institutional) coordination? Which institutions are involved and how?
12. Do you think there is enhanced coherence in the EU development policies following a renewed commitment to transparency and clearness?
13. How are the EU's development policies for Egypt coordinated with those of the Member States?
14. Considering Egypt's characteristics, which aspect is subject to greater changes when designing related development policies?
15. Which is the most suitable type of funding management for Egypt?
16. How does the closed space for CSOs influence these kinds of choices?

17. How has the instrument been perceived by the population?
18. Do you see any hope for the democratic development of the country?
19. How does the type of government/regime in the Southern Neighbourhood countries influence the design of development policies, and what impact does this have on their implementation?
20. What type of regime is there in Egypt, and how does it influence the success of European policies? (e.g., project approval, entry permits, poor promotion of the EU to civil society, etc.)
21. Has shifting the EU's approach from imposing its policies to contributing to national strategies led to better results?
22. Has the partner country already provided feedback on the action plans of past years or on the new approach?

Interview 4: DG NEAR official from Jordan's desk

Questions:

1. What, in your opinion, is the greatest obstacle to the success of European development policies?
2. Based on your experience, do you believe the problem is more related to funding and resources or to how these are utilised?
3. In your view, do internal coordination problems carry more weight, or are the obstacles encountered in partner countries more decisive in determining the success of development policies?
4. What are the main obstacles to the implementation of European development policies in the Southern Neighbourhood countries? And specifically in Jordan?
5. How has the democratic situation in Jordan improved thanks to European policies? In your opinion, what is the most effective way/tool to contribute to the country's democratic development?
6. How has the European Union's approach changed through the NDICI?
7. What are the most significant improvements introduced by this instrument?
8. How does the NDICI contribute to improving internal (inter-institutional) cooperation? Which institutions are involved and how?
9. How are EU development policies for Jordan coordinated with those of the Member States?

10. To what extent does the type of government/regime in the Southern Neighbourhood countries influence the design of development policies, and what impact does this have on their implementation?
11. What type of regime is there in Jordan, and how does this influence the success of European policies? (e.g. project approval, entry permits into the country, poor "promotion" of the EU to civil society, etc.)
12. Has the shift in the EU's approach from imposing its policies to contributing to national strategies led to better outcomes?
13. Has the partner country already provided feedback on past years' action plans or the new approach?
14. When considering the characteristics of Jordan, which aspect receives the most attention when designing the relevant development policies?
15. What do you believe were the main steps in the EU's effort to close the efficacy gap in its development policy?
16. How has the EU improved in designing more tailored policies for partner countries?
17. To what extent do you believe that treating countries as partners rather than recipients, by involving them in the process of planning actions, contributes to closing the gap between expectations and results?