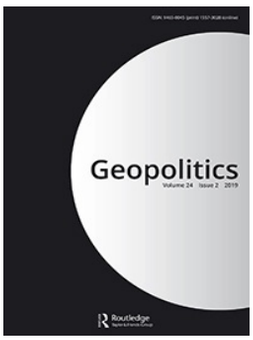

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The EU Trust Fund for Africa: Geopolitical Space Making through Migration Policy Instruments

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ABSTRACT

As a response to the migration crisis, the EU has not only revised its policies but also mobilized resources, introduced new tools, or adapted the existing ones to the changing context. While the debate at the policy level is burgeoning, instruments have been limitedly explored. What kind of geopolitical dynamics are EU migration policy instruments producing? How do they contribute to redesigning the EU-African geopolitical space? The article combines a policy instruments approach with a spatial perspective on the EU migration policy. Through the analysis of the 2015 EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, it raises the argument that migration policy instruments are powerful spatial practices that are shaping the EU-African geopolitical space by coordinating the EU's and Member States' priorities and understandings of migration. Overall, the paper suggests that research on the EU external relations, particularly in the realm of migration, should not only pay more attention to policy instruments but also map them in the targeted territories to avoid "cartographic traps" and better understand the impact of the policies under scrutiny.

The migration crisis has brought space and geopolitics back into the political discourses and agenda of the EU and its Member States (Nitoiu and Sus 2019). Depending on the challenges of controlling migration routes, Southern and Western European borders have moved closer or farther in the European collective imagination. The EU relations with some third countries – be they states of origin or transit – have regained centrality in political discourses and rhetoric drawing on spatial concepts to govern human flows such as migration corridors (along the Western, Central or Eastern Mediterranean migration route), hotspots, hubs and regional platforms in non-European countries has flourished. Beyond the discursive level, the attempts to externalize or extra-territorialize border controls and migrants' processing practices have altered the European geopolitical space (Del Sarto 2015; Slominski and Trauner 2020). Moreover, the redefinition of the EU Neighbourhood from a 'ring of friends' to a 'ring of fire' around Europe to paraphrase the words of the EU

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Supplemental data for this article can be accessed here.

Commissioner Johannes Hahn (European Commission 2015a) has entailed a rethinking of regional strategies, such as the Neighbourhood Policy or the Sahel strategy, to address new and old sources of threats in a more comprehensive way (European Commission 2015b).

The development of the EU migration policy is part and parcel of this process of geopolitical space-making in the African continent and the academic debate has increasingly tried to capture these spatial phenomena (Ahad and Collett 2017; Garelli and Tazzioli 2016; İşleyen 2018). Some scholars argue, in particular, that the EU responses to different waves of migration over time are key to understand the 'spatialities of Europeanization' beyond the EU since they are shaping and re-shaping the Neighbourhood space far more than other policies (Carrera, den Hertog, and Parkin 2012; Collyer 2016). Yet, research on geopolitics and the EU´s migration policy is producing, exploring and conceptualizing spatial metaphors without grounding them enough in the specific territories involved in the operations.

As highlighted by den Hertog (2016), one of the major but under-analysed EU responses to the migration crisis has been its financial dimension, consisting in a partial reconfiguration of the EU funding landscape for migration, asylum and border policies, the redefinition of some implementation rules and the launch of a new instrument, the EU Trust Fund for Africa. According to the literature on policy instruments, these changes cannot be treated as evidence nor as having little to do with the spatial phenomena described hitherto. Not only are policy instruments signifiers of policy choices, as they are a 'condensed and finalized form of knowledge about social control and ways of exercising it' (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, 11). They also produce specific effects, because they structure the process and the results of the policy. This perspective offered by the instrumentation literature opens up interesting avenues for further researching the geopolitical reconfigurations described above and raise some interesting questions. What is the impact of migration policy instruments on the EU–Africa geopolitical space? More specifically, how do they contribute to geopolitical space-making dynamics?

To address these questions, the focus is on the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) established in 2015 as a representative case for the EU response to the migration crisis to map and understand the transformation of the EU–Africa geopolitics. Assuming that migration policy instruments are spatial practices – thus capable of challenging the existing configurations of space by altering the conflicting forces that act upon it (Lefebvre 1991) – the paper aims at identifying what kind of geopolitical spaces are migration policy instruments producing beyond the Southern Mediterranean borders. These include both formal spaces such as the 'regional windows' established through the EUTF strategic documents, and informal ones, determined by the distribution and the nature of the funded activities. Being the most recent funding tool set up by the EU in the realm of migration and the first directly addressing migration in third

countries, the EUTF as a case under scrutiny is an important empirical contribution to the rich debate on the EU migration policy, especially its external dimension (Balzacq 2009; Panizzon 2017; Wolff 2012, 2014), on practices of externalisation (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2016) and 'bordering' (Bialasiewicz et al. 2009). Moreover, its half-intergovernmental nature, its geographic scope covering three 'windows' so far targeted by other EU funding tools and its thematic dimensions encompassing border management to deal also with migration management and development cooperation allow speaking to the literature on the EU external relations more broadly. From a conceptual and theoretical point of view, the choice of considering EU migration policy instruments as spatial practices helps to connect the rich literature on space, borders and migration from critical border studies, political geography and critical migration studies with EU studies interested in EU migration policy-making, its processes and outcomes.

The paper first sets the analytical framework, it illustrates how scholars have so far discussed the spatial implications of EU migration policies especially in origin and transit countries and, then, how a policy instrument approach contributes to the debate. The following section puts the EUTF in context by discussing the development of EU migration policy instruments and the main features of this funding tool. The article then presents the empirical analysis and identifies three main space-making trajectories entailed by the EUTF implementation. The first involves the redefinition of formal and informal geopolitical regions in the African continent such as the Southern Neighbourhood or the Sahel, the second altering local and regional geographies of power according to migration flows and routes, and the third which is creating overlapping geopolitical maps as a result of different European interests and relations. The research relies on primary material that has never been published before. It maps in detail the spatial distribution of 179 projects – its actors and roles, activities, financial contributions, geographic location – funded through the EU Trust Fund from its launch until mid-2019 to understand how these are re-designing the EU–Africa geopolitical space. The elaboration and visualization of the EUTF data-set of the European Commission have been triangulated with information collected through document analysis (project websites, project reports, EU documents on the EUTF implementation) and with 22 ad-hoc interviews held in Brussels, Vienna and by phone in 2019 with EU institutions, some EU Member States financially contributing to the EUTF and the main implementing partners of the EUTF (development agencies, international organisations, non-governmental organisations). The aim of the interviews was to collect more details about the location and activities of the funded projects, their rationale and their progress. The final section summarises the findings and reflects on their empirical and theoretical relevance.

EU Migration Policies and the Making of Geopolitical Space beyond the Southern Mediterranean Borders

Research on the construction of 'spaces of migration' and on the spatial dimension of the EU´s migration policies only dates back to the early 2000s. Since 2003, migration management has become a key component of the EU's external relations and the policy responses to the refugee crisis since 2015 have offered even richer empirical cases to explore the making and re-making of this space. Border control operations have, more than any other EU intervention, attracted the interest of EU scholars dealing with geopolitics and the EU migration policies. Those have pointed to the expansion and multiplication of borders blurring the definition of Neighbourhood (Bialasiewicz 2012; Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2016), building 'borderlands' (Del Sarto 2015) or a fragmented Mediterranean region (Collyer 2016). However, according to some, the academic focus on border policies has plunged the African space, and the Southern Mediterranean region in particular, into a 'cartographic trap [...] fixing the understanding of a spatial process to its edges' (Garelli and Tazzioli 2016, 6). While providing relevant accounts of the spatial phenomena taking place beyond Europe´s borders, such as the militarization of maritime borders or the creation of urban *enclaves* close to coastal areas, these analyses only limitedly target spaces other than those immediately facing Europe. I argue here that an approach looking at the broader spectrum of the EU policy instruments, beyond border control operations, allows filling part of this gap and better identify the transformations of the EU–Africa geopolitical space.

The Spatial Turn in EU Migration Research

The relationship between space and migration has been researched from various angles. Scholars have pointed to the increasing importance of transnational migrant (urban) spaces in host countries (Collins 2009; Schiller 2014), economic spatialities of migration (Klein-Beekman 1996), gendered spaces of migration and the impact of migration and migrant remittances on urbanisation in home countries. Others have focused on migration and the politics of space showing how different uses of geographical scale can obscure or articulate the violence happening in these borderlands (Mitchell, Jones, and Fluri 2019) and how counter-mapping projects can show that spaces are 'not stable, but open and unstabilized' (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015, 66).

This paper seeks to focus on another aspect of (geopolitical) space-making which has been only limitedly dealt with: the process of construction and deconstruction by the EU and its Member States of recognized geopolitical systems beyond its Southern borders – 'the Sahel', 'Horn of Africa', the 'Southern Neighbourhood' or 'North Africa' (Zulaika 2014, 35) – to better

address its geopolitical interests (Graee Gammeltoft-Hansen 2006; Mattelaer 2014). Geopolitical space-making refers to how geopolitical relationships, strategies, and interests conceptualize, create, shape, or influence spaces. Geopolitical space is always made through power and never already there, waiting to be discovered (Ashley 1987); it is created through discourse and is in this way a social construction (Heathershaw 2007). Therefore, it is not a fixed geographical entity but a social, political, and culturally specific ordering of space. The interests in creating geopolitical space can be diverse and include the importance of certain regions to foreign policy (Svarin 2016), how certain regions are viewed as origins of threats or as a threat themselves, or as entities representing certain values and political systems that have to be protected, as is the case with the EU (Lannon 2014).

In the case of the EU, countries included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) are not always neighbours of the EU geographically speaking (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Jordan), while countries that are neighbours are not always included in the ENP (Turkey, Switzerland) (Lannon 2014). In the same way, not all neighbours of the EU's neighbours are included in this new geopolitical space as 'there are obviously strategic and economic interests at work that pushed the EU to go beyond a pure geographical approach in favour of a geopolitical one' (Lannon 2014, 9). Recently, and following increasing concerns about migration to Europe from these regions, the EU has been thinking about 'a new 'arc of crisis and strategic challenges' from the Sahel to Central Asia,' a 'second ring' around the immediate neighbours of the EU, which represent its original 'ring of friends' included in the ENP (Lannon 2014, 1). This went in tandem with the EU embracing more traditional strategic and geopolitical approaches (Nitoiu and Sus 2019).

Many scholars have used the concepts of externalization and extra-territorialisation of border management and migrants´ processing to describe the making of new spaces. The EU´s and individual member states´ increasing cooperation with third countries on migration governance through bilateral agreements has backed research on borders and the spatial impact of migration control (Brachet 2016; Casas-Cortes et al. 2015). The spatial consequences of these EU policies include the construction of extraterritorial processing zones, 'buffer zones', and detention camps in transit and origin countries (Gabrielli 2011; İçduygu 2015), which effectively 'push the border south', leading to new migration routes and thus additional European intervention in new countries such as Mauritania or Senegal (Gabrielli 2011).

Despite a burgeoning debate and with few exceptions (Collyer 2016; Nitoiu and Sus 2019; Trauner and Deimel 2013; Wolff 2015a), studies focused on migration and geopolitics disregard the spatial dimension of changing geopolitical interests. They tend to choose a macro-level of analysis and look at how policies reproduce changing perceptions and understandings of some areas as sources of threat, challenges and opportunities. On the other hand, those

trying to capture the processes of making space by locating the EU´s activities only limitedly engage with geopolitical space beyond border regions and transit countries (Collyer and King 2015; İşleyen 2018; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis 2012). This gap in research on the geopolitics of the EU migration policy and on its spatial impact leaves some questions unanswered: which countries, regions and territories are being included and excluded in this process of making and remaking of the EU-African geopolitical space? What drives these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion? Are new geopolitical regions being created or existing ones, such as the so-called Neighbourhood, being transformed?

A Policy Instrument Approach to Geopolitical Space-making

As pointed out above, the spatiality of EU migration policies in Africa is a fairly new research topic. To address the research questions, I assume that EU instruments for migration management are spatial practices, insomuch as they can 'alter the existing configurations of space, based on the assumption that space is a product shaped by conflicting forces that act upon it' (Lefebvre 1991, 23). Instruments not only determine what resources can be used and by whom. They also establish where they can be used.

While some efforts have been devoted to investigating the impact of border management practices on the targeted territories (Côté-Boucher, Infantino, and Salter 2014; Garelli and Tazzioli 2016), programmes and projects addressing migration more broadly have rarely been mapped and the rationale behind their spatial distribution has not been thoroughly explored. Overall, the literature on policy instruments is still scarce in the EU scholarship, in particular in the realm of the EU external action. The choice of instruments and tools to implement public policies as well as their actual functioning is often studied as a corollary to the policy-making process, as a purely technical dimension, or as if the questions they raise are secondary issues. They are, though, 'a device that is both technical and social, that organizes specific social relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representations and meanings it carries' (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, 4). Recent research on the EU´s migration policy, for instance, has focused on the shift from legally binding tools to flexible instruments such as the mobility partnerships, the migration compacts and the readmission agreements. In line with Lascoumes' and Le Gales' argument, these analyses have demonstrated that changes in the EU´s migration policy toolbox are driven by the EU's and third countries attempts to overcome political struggles or circumvent legal constraints when engaging in cooperation in a contested realm (Cassarino 2014; Trauner and Wolff 2014; Zardo 2017). They have also shown how recipients parties contribute to designing and transforming policy instruments. Yet, instruments are institutions that can 'eventually privilege certain

actors and interests and exclude others, constrain the actors while offering them possibilities, drive forward a certain representation of problems' (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, 9). Scholars dealing with the EU development policy have explored this dimension more thoroughly. While not all of them explicitly adopt a policy instrument approach, they have illustrated, for instance, the extent to which the choice of direct or indirect management systems in delivering EU aid explains changes in the conceptualisation of development cooperation and even preceded changes at the policy level (Wolff 2015a; Bicchi 2014; Holden, 2005a). Or, they have discussed the local impact of instruments such as budget support, which might contradict policy objectives (Del Biondo and Orbie 2014).

Far more work is needed on these aspects of the design and impact of migration management tools. This article moves beyond the existing debates on EU migration policy instrument and geopolitical space-making by focusing on the first EU instrument financing a diverse range of interventions and by analysing the 179 EUTF projects funded until mid-2019. It assumes that space and spatial imaginaries are part of the ideational system underlying the instrumentation process. While the ideational turn in political science has generated attention to how ideas and paradigms can drive instrument choice, the paper pushes the reflection further and looks at how informal spaces can be created, intentionally or not, also during the implementation process and consolidate or challenge existing beliefs and representations. The findings open up room for future investigation on how instruments can drive policy change by triggering paradigm change and is particularly relevant in the realm of migration where disagreements among EU member states have prevented major reforms.

The EU External Governance of Migration and the Financial Responses to the 2015 Migration Crisis

The relevance of migration governance in the broader spectrum of EU funded activities in third countries has significantly grown since 2015, either through budgetary increase and adjustments to existing frameworks or through the creation of new programmes, such as the Trust Fund for in Response to the Syrian Crisis or the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (Hertog 2016). Cooperation between the EU and third countries on migration issues can be financed through different sources and programmes depending on the geographic location of the partner and the inclusion of this priority in the national operational documents such Action Plans, National and Regional Indicative Programmes. Four programmes specifically target migration, asylum and border control.[1] The Global Public Goods and Challenges (GPGC) programme was, until 2015, the main thematic programme for external cooperation on migration and asylum under the Development Cooperation

Instrument aimed at ensuring 'improved management of migratory flows in all their dimensions' (European Commission 2014, 83) without a geographic scope. The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Borders and Visa Instrument Fund (ISF) are managed by the Directorate-General for Home Affairs (DG Home) and increasingly include also cooperation with third countries.

In November 2015 the European Commission established the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing the Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa (EUTF). The EUTF was launched at the Summit in La Valletta as the main financial instrument to implement the La Valletta Action Plan and 'enable the EU, its Member States and the international community to respond collectively to the migration challenges in a shared strategic framework, in concertation with national and regional authorities and through a true division of labour' (European Commission 2015a). The 'La Valletta Action Plan' adopted by leaders from the EU and African countries set out five priority domains of cooperation: addressing the root causes of irregular migration and developing the benefits of migration; promoting legal migration and mobility; reinforcing protection and asylum policies; fighting against human trafficking and migrant smuggling; and strengthening cooperation to facilitate return and reintegration of irregular migrants. The EUTF was launched as an emergency instrument to coordinate and reorganize EU funds to pursue these priorities and deal with 'situations where experience has shown that the weakness of the local administrations combined with a sudden increase in the number of donors requires strong coordination of the international community' (European Commission 2015a, 5). It did not mobilize new sources of financing at the EU level, pooling together existing amounts from the European Development Fund (EDF), the Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), DCI and others. The Member States, however, pledged complementary amounts, reaching a total allocation for cooperation on migration of 4 billion Euros from 2015 to 2018. From this perspective, it represents a relevant change in the EU funding landscape since it introduces a targeted instrument for external cooperation on migration whose magnitude for 4 years almost equals the sum of AFIM, ISF and GPGC programmes for 2014–2020.

Its geographic scope, divided into three 'regional windows' – North Africa, Sahel and Lake Chad and the Horn of Africa – does not entirely match with any regional window previously targeted by other tools but rather follows migration routes, areas of origin and countries of transit. This design deserves some attention. As pointed out by Smith and Katz (1993, 75), metaphors become problematic 'in so far as they presume that space is not' and might hide the complex and changing nature of the EU-Mediterranean, EU–Africa or EU-Neighbourhood spaces as targets of the EU policies. Interestingly, new countries have been added to the 'geographic windows' since its launch. As

reported in the implementation report for 2017, the Strategic Board of the EUTF for Africa agreed in December 2016 to add three eligible countries (Ghana, Guinea and Ivory Coast) and to highlight the case-by-case possibility to include the neighbours of EUTF beneficiaries. While the targeted regions are different from those identified in other EU policies and strategies such as the Sahel Strategy, the ENP or the Cotonou Agreement, overlap exists in terms of priorities highlighted in the Agreement establishing the EUTF. Some of them, for instance, recall traditional development goals, raising concerns about the rerouting of development assistance interventions to achieve internal security goals (Concord 2018).

Trust Funds, among which the EU Trust Fund for Africa, fall outside the EU budget and are regulated by specific governance structures. The board governing the Fund (the Operational Committee) is made of representatives of the European Commission and the Member States, whose voting rights depend on the amount pledged; the projects selection, the programming and the management phases do not follow the standard EU procedures and are weakly regulated. Moreover, the European Parliament has no oversight of the EUTF activities. The half-intergovernmental nature of the EUTF involves a different balance of power between the EU and the Member States compared to centralized EU programmes and conventional development instruments (CEPS 2018). Despite these distinctive features, its political relevance – having been presented as one of the key EU responses to the migration crisis -, its interaction with other EU instruments in terms of priorities, and its financial weight make it a highly suitable case to advance our understanding of the geopolitical impact of the EU migration policy.

Trajectories of Transformation of the EU-Africa Geopolitical Space

From its launch until mid-2019, the EUTF funded 179 programmes for an amount of 3.5 billion Euros. Among them, 90 target the Sahel and Lake Chad region (window A), 64 are located in the Horn of Africa (window B) and 22 projects cover North Africa (window C). Moreover, three of them overcome the regional boundaries and constitute the cross-window projects, whose trans-regional nature has been recently added to the geographic scope of the Fund.

The projects' geographic distribution per regional window, per thematic dimension, type of activity, amount invested and actors involved evidence a first trajectory of transformation: the EUTF is contributing to redefining the boundaries of geopolitical regions such as the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the EU Southern Neighbourhood thus challenging the spatial representations created through previous instruments such as the ENP, regional dialogues or the EU development policy. The number of projects approved (36%, excluding projects under the cross-regional window) and the aggregated budget for Sahel

and Lake Chad countries amounting to 1.648 billion Euros confirm the argument that the EU has been increasing its engagement in the region (Mattelaer 2014). Its geopolitical relevance gained prominence in 2008, culminating in the launch of the Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel (EEAS 2011). Within the EUTF, the balance among thematic dimensions (see Figure 1) shows not only that the region is targeted by more projects, but also that this is the area where the EU seems to have a clearer strategy about how to address the complexity of the migration phenomenon. As two officials working on the EUTF for the European Commission argue: 'challenges and opportunities in the Sahel are clear and our networks with actors on the ground are settled, this makes it easier to plan and implement projects'.[2] Interestingly enough, however, a closer look at the geographic scope of other EU instruments for the Sahel reveals diverse representations of this geopolitical space. The Sahel as a space of migration delineated by the EUTF is wider than the Sahel as a space of security outlined in the 2011 Sahel Strategy, which includes only Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad. At the same time, the EU development policy through the EDF targets a broader area, including countries, such as Togo, which, according to some interviewees, are becoming 'the EUTF forgotten'.[3] This incongruity in the way the Sahel is represented and bordered matters because the coexistence of different regional maps in policy areas – such as migration, development or security – that have overlapping goals, can easily lead to conflicts and confrontations affecting policy outcomes and future policy choices.

While the EUTF is contributing to expanding the geopolitical borders of the Sahel region, in the Horn of Africa the new instrument covers the same

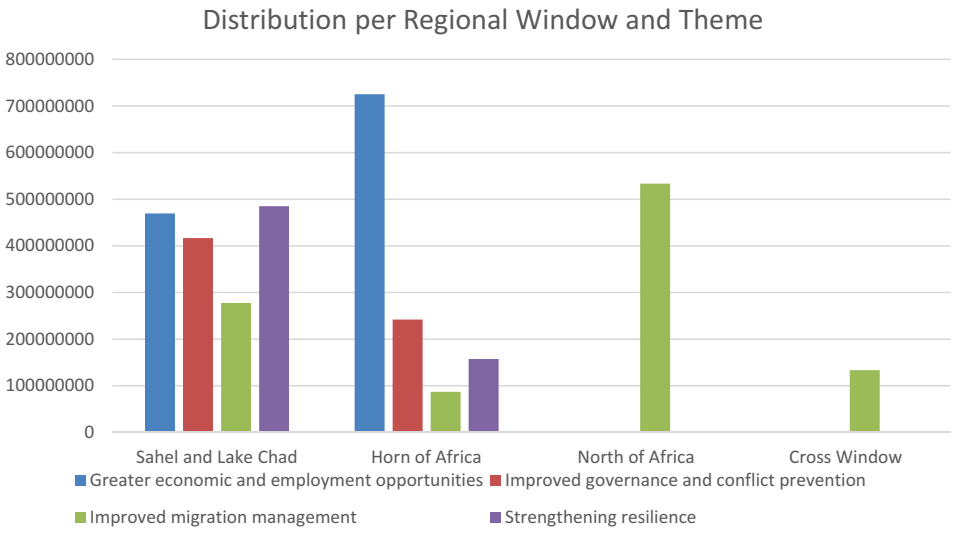

Figure 1. EU trust fund distribution per window and thematic dimension. Source: author´s elaboration from EU dataset.

countries included in the EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa (European Council 2011)[4] and only Tanzania has been added to the EUTF Window B. The funded EUTF programmes mainly fall under the category 'greater economic and employment opportunities', attracting 74% of the budget for the whole region (725 million out of 1.211 billion Euros). The distribution mirrors a representation of the space as one of overlapping crisis generating significant migration flows and is linked to the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (European Commission 2019b). As described in the website of the Programme,[5] the EU aims at addressing the challenges through an approach that is 'geographically comprehensive and holistic, putting the region at the centre of our response'. This resulted in a relatively higher number of regional projects compared to the other EUTF windows, and stronger cooperation with regional actors on the ground such as the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD).

Unlike in the Horn of Africa, where the space-making trajectory is, to a major extent, consistent with other EU tools covering the area, the distribution of EUTF activities in North Africa draws a more complex picture. On the one hand, its inclusion in the EUTF, which is an instrument targeting a broad range of African countries, and the lack of reference to North African countries as part of the 'EU Neighbourhood' in the EUTF strategic documents, substantiate the argument of a region whose borders are expanding towards the 'Southernmost Neighbourhood' (Mattelaer 2014, 46) in the imaginary of European policy-makers. On the other hand, by confining the EUTF interventions in North Africa to the thematic dimension 'migration management', this financial instrument consolidates the representation of this geopolitical space as one of transit. This conceptualisation is acting as a constraining factor for regional cooperation. As reported by one UNHCR representative, it is 'not only limiting the impact of the EU migration policy within the countries by addressing only part of the problem'[6] but also delaying 'much-needed cooperation' at the continental level. The introduction of EUTF cross-window projects in 2017 tries to compensate for this shortcoming and adds to the existing EU efforts to establish South–South cross-border mechanisms such as the Instrument for Stability (Zulaika 2014). Yet, the three cross-window projects funded so far mainly engage the target countries in cooperation on the protection and return of migrants along the Mediterranean route rather than on fostering economic cooperation and development.[7] Hence, while it is true that struggles in South–South cooperation are complex to decipher and long-standing, the analysis of the EUTF projects suggests that the design and implementation of cooperation frameworks are contributing to consolidating 'cartographic traps' (Garelli and Tazzioli 2016) that might affect regional geopolitics.

Besides redesigning the boundaries of geopolitical regions as described above, the EUTF is also altering the power positioning of some African

countries vis-à-vis others and of some areas within the same countries. Indeed, the countries' inclusion or exclusion from the EUTF windows, the amount allocated to each of them, the location and the nature of the funded activities within the national borders affect Africa's geopolitics. When a geopolitical space is imagined, certain other geographic spaces are included or excluded based on strategic and security criteria or others, such as the values they are seen to embody, and not on their geographical location per se (Nitoiu and Sus 2019). This leads to new maps and other spatial representations, but also to new geopolitical rivalries and relations.

A comparison of the EDF and EUTF country allocations shows the extent to which countries like Somalia, Libya, Niger, Ethiopia, Mauritania have become pivotal for the EU, while other such as Cameroun or Tanzania are partly losing their centrality. The latter is, for instance, designated and internationally recognized as Least Developed Countries (LDC). As a consequence, it is the third most funded country in Africa through the EDF. By contrast, the EUTF has been funding the country only in the framework of three regional projects and no bilateral programme is active so far (see Figure 2). Likewise, both some interviews conducted for this research with experts and project managers involved in EUTF projects[8] and recent NGOs' reports point to how dynamics of spatial inclusion and exclusion are taking place also within the beneficiary countries (Concord 2018; Oxfam 2020). This is the case, for instance, of a critical area such as the Lake Chad Basin in Niger or of small Libyan municipalities which are either minor 'areas of origin' or peripheral 'cities of transit' and have been very limitedly targeted by EUTF projects. These geopolitical transformations are the result of the countries' position along the

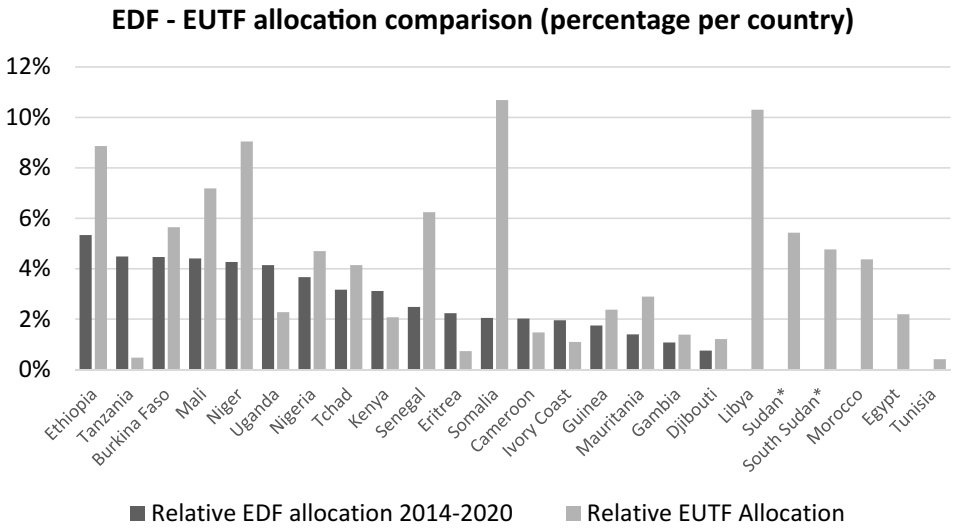

Figure 2. EDF and EUTF amounts allocated per beneficiary country. Source: author's elaboration from EU dataset.

migration route and the proximity with border crossing areas as key criteria guiding the EUTF activities. Research on African migration to Europe has already highlighted how trans-Saharan transit migrants create new urban and economic spaces or revitalise ancient routes and oases, which change in response to the EU's changing policies and changing migratory routes (Bredeloup and Pliez 2011). Unlike these studies which point to migrants' space-making abilities, however, such a convergence of interventions in countries of origin and transit might lead to grievous effects on development opportunities and contradict the EUTF comprehensive approach to migration. As one interviewee working for the UNHCR argued: 'this is not only a matter of lack of local ownership but also of effectiveness of the interventions which are supposedly aimed at addressing the root causes of migration'.[9]

The third trajectory observed is the ever-increasing polarization of EU–Africa geopolitical relations according to the donors' interests. The extension of the EU's sphere of intervention was already part of a mission to 'counter the scourge of rising organized crime and militant fundamentalism' (O' Sullivan 2014, 23), referring to the situation in Libya, Mali, and the Sahel. Moreover, in the context of its strategy to curtail and discourage migration, cross-regional cooperation between transit and third countries has been increasingly encouraged by the EU and the member states (Wolff 2015b). However, compared to other EU's external action instruments such as the EDF, the European Neighbourhood Instrument or the AMIF programme, the EUTF selection and management procedures have so far left significant leeway to the projects' proponents to focus on those countries and territories that are more in line with national political agenda (CEPS 2018). The importance of the Sahel region for France, for instance, who put the area on the EU agenda for the first time during the French Presidency in 2008 (Mattelaer 2014) stands out when mapping and locating its involvement in both bilateral and regional programmes (see Figure 3).

Similarly, the leading role of Italy in Libya due to its historical legacies (Loschi and Russo 2020) and the country's presence in Morocco, Sudan and Ethiopia mirror a political agenda focused on border control. Germany's wide geopolitical map, as well as the substantial contribution of Belgium to the EUTF especially on the first and second thematic dimensions (greater economic opportunity and improved governance and conflict prevention), build on both the countries' geopolitical concerns and their experience in development cooperation through GIZ and ENABEL as implementing agencies.[10] At the same time, it is worth noting that the fast procedures set up for the definition and selection of EUTF projects did not leave much room for local actors in target countries to participate. While the level of consultation of Civil Society Organisations and local actors is still debated and has improved over time (Concord 2018) and there has been no formal contestation of the EUTF by third countries' government with the exception of Algeria,[11] less than 10%

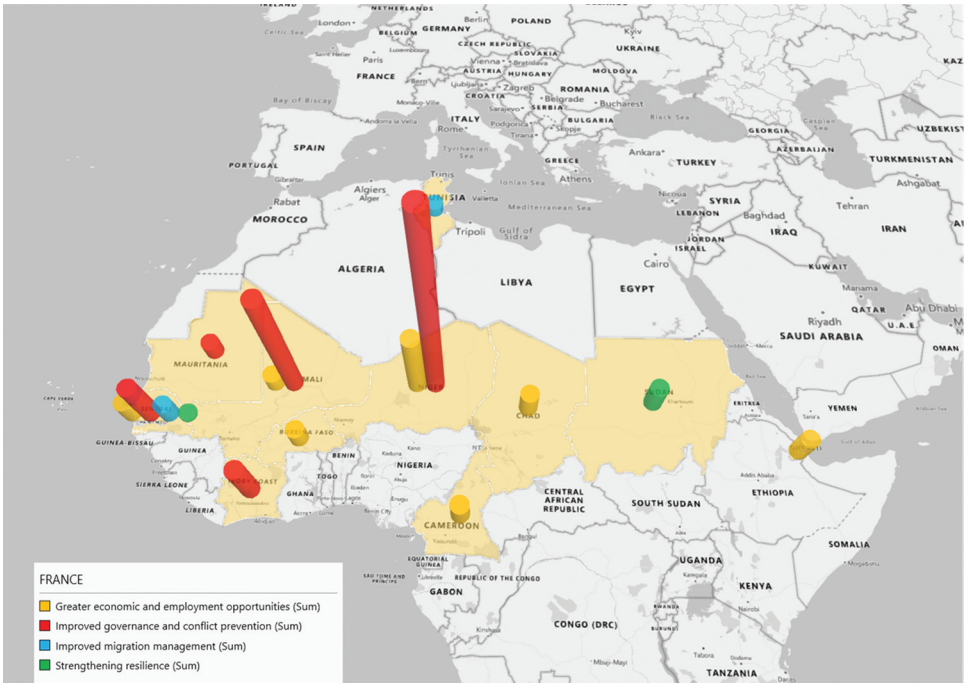

Figure 3. Involvement of France in EUTF projects. Source: author's elaboration from EU dataset.

of the implementing actors of the funded projects is a local partner. Moreover, due to the lack of a formal call for proposal it was not possible to reconstruct the application and selection process to understand the extent to which local actors tried to submit projects and programmes. However, expert reports (Concord 2018; Oxfam 2020) and interlocutors from development agencies[12] confirm that the emergency nature of the instrument favoured big European and international actors and Member States interests.

These dynamics are creating overlapping maps of strong bilateral relations – between the Member States and the African country concerned – and broader geopolitical spaces recognized at the EU and international level. The latter is, in fact, far more involved in the EU's effort to pursue a regional approach to migration through the EUTF. International Organizations (like UNHCR or the IOM) are leading more than half of ongoing regional programmes,[13] with only France and Germany as Member States more directly contributing to regional projects especially in the realm of security and border management. This distribution is due, in part, to the specific competences and knowledge of the implementing actors. Yet, as suggested by the instrumentation literature, the choice of policy tools is not neutral. It reflects the actors' interpretation of problems, solutions and the underlying values (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007). Considering the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's ambition to lead a 'truly geopolitical Commission' (European Commission

2019a), the polarization triggered by the EUTF design might increase the coordination challenge and undermine the development of what the newly appointed High Representative Josep Borrell called 'a common strategic culture' (Borrell 2020).

Conclusion

Assuming that policy instruments are not only signifiers of policy choices but they also structure the policy process and its results, this article aimed at identifying and explaining the patterns of geopolitical space-making in the EU Southern and 'Southernmost' Neighbourhood (Mattelaer 2014, 46) based on the analysis of the implementation of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. Launched after the summit in La Valletta in 2015, the EUTF constitutes the most interesting operational response of the EU to the migration crisis. In being a half-intergovernmental instrument (co-funded by the EU through existing sources and by some Member States and bypassing standard governance procedures of EU funding tools), it allowed exploring the different understandings of migration as a challenge in EU–Africa relations and their impact on the European representation of the EU-African geopolitical space.

The analysis highlighted three main trajectories of transformation of the geopolitical space as conceptualized by European actors. First, the geographic scope of this instrument, divided into three regional windows, one for North Africa, one for the Sahel and Lake Chad and one for the Horn of Africa, and its thematic overlap with EU development cooperation tools are changing the representation of these regions as recognizable geopolitical systems. In line with recent research findings on the external dimension of the EU migration policy, the EUTF is strengthening the geopolitical relevance of the Sahel. The spatiality of EUTF interventions, however, is blurring the regional boundaries even further, since the choice of target countries follows migration flows rather than territorial, economics, social and political similarities. Less fragmentation is observed in the case of the Horn of Africa, while the priority given to border management of EUTF interventions in North African countries is putting the regional space under pressure, limiting the possibilities for a broader Neighbourhood to develop. Second, while the design of the EUTF embraces different dimensions of international migration and seeks to deal with all of them, the spatial focus on migration routes and border crossings is changing the (geo)political relevance of some countries and territories, altering the relations among them and creating new cartographic traps through inclusionary or exclusionary dynamics. As a consequence, countries like Togo, small municipalities which are far from the main migration crossroads or complex spaces are facing the risk of being out of the donors' maps. Third, the distribution of the projects, the EUTF documents analysis and the interviews demonstrated that the instrument is contributing to strengthening the EU

Member States' bilateral relations with some countries or regions, further fragmenting the African geopolitics.

The research raises the argument that migration policy instruments are powerful spatial practices that are shaping the EU-African geopolitical space-(s) by either coordinating or scattering the variety of EU and Member States interests and their understandings of migration in relation to specific regions, countries and territories. Their analysis helps to deconstruct EU policies through their tools and to 'address dimensions of public policy that would otherwise not be very visible' (Lascoumes and Le Gales 2007, 9). Conceptually, the findings strengthen the claim that ideas and paradigms driving the instrumentation process should be further explored (Capano and Howlett 2020). When spatial imaginaries emerge through the choice and the implementation of a particular policy instrument, such as the ENP 'Neighbourhood' or the EUTF 'wider Sahel', other frames and representations can be challenged or consolidated and affect, again, policy and instrument design. This is particularly relevant in the migration realm since conflicting cognitive beliefs might impact on a variety of policy areas such as development, security or trade. The definition of new EU financial instruments under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2028 which is ongoing at the time of writing will be an interesting litmus test of the repercussions of new spatial frames across policies.

Notes

1. Although they are 'bordering practices' with clear spatial impact, this article does not take into account Frontex operations in the Mediterranean since it aims at discussing EU-third countries cooperation programmes.
2. Interview with two European Commission officials, DG DEVCO, held in Brussels, February 26th 2019.
3. Interview with a representative of a Member States to the EU Council, held in Brussels, February 26th 2019.
4. The EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa involves the countries belonging to the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD): Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda.
5. EUTF Website, available at https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/horn-africa/(Accessed 30 January 2020).
6. Interview with UNHCR representative held in Brussels, February 27th 2019.
7. The funded cross-window projects are: a) Erasmus+ in West Africa and the Horn of Africa; b) Protection and sustainable solutions for migrants and refugees along the Central Mediterranean route and c) South-South cooperation on migration. The latter has developed into a comprehensive project going beyond migration control.and return.
8. Interview with a representative of a Member States to the EU Council, held in Brussels, February 26th 2019. Interview with UNHCR representative held in Brussels, February 27th 2019.
9. Interview with UNHCR representative held in Brussels, February 27th 2019.

10. Interview with an official working for a development agency of a EU Member State, held in Brussels, February 24th 2019.
11. Interview with a representative of an EU delegation to a partner country, held by phone, 12nd August 2019.
12. Interview with two officials working for development agencies of two EU Member State, held in Brussels, February 23th 2019.
13. It is worth noticing that the EUTF allocation ratio between regional and bilateral cooperation is similar to other instruments. An EUTF/EDF comparison shows that the ratio until 2019 was 23% for both instruments.

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