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RESEARCH ARTICLE



How strategies of refugee host states are perceived by donor states: EU interpretations of Jordanian migration diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

Research in the field of migration diplomacy has empirically focused mainly on host and transit states, meaning that their interaction with donor states and the effect of their strategies on the donor states' decision-making has been left implicit. Building on original interviews with decision-makers, this paper provides a unique insight into the interaction between host state and donor state, and sheds light on how the strategies of the former translate into policies of the latter. The paper addresses the following research questions: *how do donor countries interpret the actions of host countries, and what makes donors respond?* To address these questions, the paper investigates EU decision-makers' perceptions of the negotiations with Jordan, which led to the establishment of the EU-Jordan Compact in 2016 and its revision in 2018. Through analysis of 19 original interviews with the negotiation participants and official documents, the paper demonstrates how the EU perceived Jordan's proposal as morally justified and how this made it difficult for them to decline. Furthermore, that the threats that Jordan made were not perceived as credible and had little effect. The case demonstrates the importance of bringing donor states into the analysis when concluding on the efficiency of host state strategies.

KEYWORDS

External migration policy; international negotiations; refugee policy; European Union; conditionality

Introduction

The migration diplomacy literature demonstrates that refugee host states hold significant power over donor states such as the member states of the European Union (EU). The number of displaced people in the world is at its highest since World War II, and the vast majority of these people are hosted by developing countries. Hosting large refugee and migrant populations is recognised as placing a significant burden on the host countries and communities. However, it might also be advantageous in negotiations with developed countries. The emergence of migration diplomacy as an academic field is a recognition of the patterns that occur in the relations between countries influenced by their positions as either a refugee host or transit country, or a destination country

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(Adamson and Tsourapas 2019a). The migration diplomacy literature has provided knowledge on the motivations and strategies of host countries from case studies (Natter 2013, 2018), and theories have been developed on the power that host states hold vis-à-vis the Global North (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019a, 2019b; Greenhill 2010, 2016). However, as has been recognised by Adamson and Tsourapas (2019b, 870), the host states ability to capitalise on migration is directly related to the Global North states' policies of externalising migration management. In concurrence with this, I argue that we need to understand the actions of both the host states and the donor states in order to get a full picture of the policy process that shapes the policies in external migration management. Otherwise, we risk making wrongful assumptions about the motivations of host states in migration diplomacy.

At the centre of all diplomacy is the interaction between actors. Research in the field of migration diplomacy has so far empirically focused mainly on host and transit states, meaning that their interaction with donor states and the effect of their strategies on the donor states decision-making has been left implicit. Building on original interviews with decision-makers, this paper provides unique insight into the interaction between host state and donor state, and sheds light on how the strategies of the former translate into policies of the latter. The paper addresses the following research questions: *how do donor countries interpret the actions of host countries, and what makes donors respond?*

To address these questions, the paper investigates the EU decision-makers' perceptions of the negotiations with Jordan which led to the establishment of the EU-Jordan Compact in 2016 and its amendment in 2018. Jordan has a long history of hosting refugee populations and leveraging this position to gain benefits from the global community (Tsourapas 2019; Seeberg and Zardo 2020). In 2015, Jordan was housing around 650.000 Syrian refugees (UNHCR 2015). In response to this, the EU-Jordan Compact of 2016 stipulated that the EU would provide aid, macro-financial assistance and, more significantly, that the EU would relax trade barriers that apply to Jordanian exports. These significant gains were achieved by a country that, unlike Turkey, had no direct way of impacting the flow of refugees onto Europe.

Using congruence analysis (Blatter and Blume 2008) of documents and original interviews with the negotiation participants, the paper inductively builds a theory explaining EU response to the Jordanian strategy. The policy documents include official EU documents monitoring the EU free trade agreement with Jordan (European Commission 2018), a report from the World Bank (2020), the original EU-Jordan Compact (EU-Jordan Association Council 2016), and the amended scheme of 2018 (EU-Jordan Association Committee 2018). Moreover, I have conducted 19 original interviews. Ten of these are with decision makers from the European Commission (DG Near, DG Trade, DG Home, DG ECFIN, DG ECHO), four are from the EU's External Action Service (EEAS), three from the Jordanian government, and two are academic experts on Jordan migration and labour policy. The interviews were conducted online in 2020 and 2021 and lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. The negotiation participants from the EU were identified through snowball sampling and include people who worked on the initial drafting of the EU-Jordan Compact and people who worked on the implementation and the re-negotiation of the Compact. From Jordan, a senior bureaucrat who worked on the implementation and two senior politicians who participated in the

negotiations also contributed. In the analysis, all interviewees are referred to by numbers (1 through 19) to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

The paper commences by introducing the two strands of literature that aim to explain EU agreements with migration host states: the EU externalisation literature and the migration diplomacy literature. It then presents an alternative approach to analysing migration diplomacy, namely focusing on donor states and their interpretations of host state's strategies. The paper argues that if the EU perceives a host country and their proposed policies as morally justifiable, the EU is likely to respond. Moreover, that moral arguments are more persuasive than threats under certain conditions. Thereafter, the EU-Jordan negotiations of 2015/2016, and the re-negotiation in 2018, are analysed in light of the EU decision-makers interpretations of the Jordanian arguments. The paper concludes that the EU assessed the credibility of threats and of normative claims, and that the normative aspects of Jordan's strategy have had significant effect in motivating the EU decision-makers. An important lesson for the migration diplomacy literature is that in order to conclude on the efficiency of different strategies that host states engage in, we need to bring the donor states into the analysis.

Why we need to consider the host and donor perspectives when studying international migration cooperation

There are currently two strands of literature that aim to explain external migration policies, and none of them adequately consider the interaction between hosts and donors. International agreements, compacts and policies in migration management, are often explained either from a Global North perspective where countries or international institutions of the Global North externalise the burden of migration governance towards the Global South by incentivising third countries or migrants, or by engaging third parties in the enforcement of their borders (Niemann and Zaun, 2023, p. 11). Or from a Global South perspective where the countries and institutions of the Global South aim to leverage their position as migrant hosts or migrant transit states to gain benefits from the Global North. The former perspective is represented by the EU externalisation literature, which has focused on explaining the external policy outputs by looking at internal dynamics within and between EU member states. An example from this issue is the contribution of Zaun and Nantermoz who explain the creation of the EU development policy tool 'the EU emergency Trust Fund for Africa', as the result of EU actors attempting to depoliticise solutions to their ongoing migration management crisis. There is a growing divergence between the EU's values of refugee protection and its protectionist policies, and Lavenex (2018) refers to this mismatch as organised hypocrisy (see also Niemann and Zaun, 2023, p. 8). Cusmano and Riddervold (2023) problematise the EU's continued dependence on fragile and undemocratic states such as Libya in their governance of irregular mobility. External dynamics, such as the EU's role as a global actor and its international reputation is not addressed in the literature. Much research has focused solely on policy outputs (Geddes and Hadj-Abdou 2018), which consist of mainly protectionist policies aimed at limiting migration. It has perhaps therefore seemed unlikely that external dynamics such as international reputation has been an important motivator for EU decision makers in migration policy, but this has not yet been explored.

The migration diplomacy literature on the other hand has a tendency to focus on the politically and economically weaker states in the Global South and how they gain influence by leveraging their key role in migration management. For example, Tittel-Mosser (2023) demonstrates the importance of third country agency in the development of the Mobility Partnerships with the EU. While the Global North benefits from globalisation and the free flow of goods across borders, they simultaneously employ a territorial legal and political logic creating a liberal paradox because they need to limit immigration in order to protect the rights of its citizens (Hollifield 2004; Adamson and Tsourapas 2019b). This puts the Global North in a position that can be leveraged by actors with influence over migration flows or that hosts large refugee populations. In the most extreme instances, the governments of host or transit countries deliberately create (or threaten to create) cross-border movement of migrants, this is referred to as coerced engineered migration (CEM) (Greenhill 2010). In a milder version of CEM, governments act as ‘opportunists’ who exploit an existing migration crisis by threatening to close borders and thus induce a humanitarian emergency, or by offering to alleviate the crisis against a pay-off (Greenhill 2010). The migration crisis of 2015 demonstrated how vulnerable European states are to coercive behaviour from states who are capable of alleviating the crisis, such as Turkey (Greenhill 2016; Gürkan and Coman 2021). Several case studies have focused on the motivations and the policy-making process in host and transit states (Natter 2013, 2018; Turner 2015; Seeberg 2020). Additionally, several studies link the host and transit countries behaviour to gains that they aim to receive from donor countries in the Global North such as the EU (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019b; İçduygu and Üstübcü 2014; Greenhill 2010, 2016; Tsourapas 2019). Most notably, Tsourapas (2019) has unpacked what determines the strategy a host countries employs vis-à-vis the donor states, in a comparative case study of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan during the Syria crisis. He finds that Jordan chose a back-scratching strategy, proposing a policy solution that would benefit both the EU and Jordan, instead of a blackmailing strategy. Furthermore, that choice of strategy is dependent on the size of the refugee population and the perceived geo-political importance of the country (vis-à-vis the donor state).

To incorporate the perspective of the donor states in the analysis, I focus on how donor states perceive the strategies of host states. By investigating the same case study, namely Jordan during the Syria crisis, but shifting the empirical focus towards the donor side, this paper addresses how the Jordanian strategy was interpreted and perceived by the donor and why they responded the way they did. This perspective is necessary, I argue, in order to draw conclusions on the efficiency of arguments put forward by host states when they seek gains from donor states. From communication theory we learn that messages are interpreted through complex processes where both previous experiences and the current context (in which the message is sent) are crucial for their interpretation. Edwards (2011) explains the two dimensions of message interpretations. One is *top down*, where previous knowledge and experience informs the recipient of the message. The second is *bottom-up* where the current situation contextualises the messages and how it is perceived. Geddes and Hadj-Abdou (2018, 147) warn that there is a tendency in migration governance research to work back from observable outputs such as policies, laws and institutional responses, and that the result is often wrongful assumptions about policy maker’s motivations and logics. Instead, we should focus on

understanding policy-makers interpretations in order to unpack the policy outputs in external migration policy (Geddes and Hadj-Abdou 2018). By focusing on the interpretations of the policy makers, hereto undiscovered explanations of EU external policy might come to light.

Leveraging the perceived moral superiority of host states

The normative ambitions of the EU in world politics have been demonstrated in various contributions, most notably those by Manners (2002, 2013). Since the Syrian war and the resulting increasing migratory pressure, the EU's ability to uphold its values in internal and external relations has arguably been compromised (Gürkan and Coman 2021; Lavenex 2018). This is at odds with the normative ambitions of the EU and challenges the self-image of the EU. Furthermore, it damages the credibility of the EU when they promote liberal migration policies in third countries. This has left the EU in a vulnerable position. If the EU receives requests from countries that, unlike the EU, have shown openness to refugee populations, it is difficult for the EU to refuse. Because the EU has not lived up to the set up norms that it claims to hold, and that the EU imposes on external partners in migration management, the EU is in an inferior moral position that can be leveraged. If the policies proposed by refugee-host states are perceived by the EU as being morally justified, the EU will be inclined to accept.

There is both an internal and an external dimension to why the EU would respond to requests that they believe are morally justifiable. Internally, the policies would appeal to domestic pressures for a rights-based approach to refugees. As politicisation of migration increased in the EU in 2015, so did the claims for more just policies for refugees and migrants. Externally, the EU wants to protect its reputation and standing in the international community and this can be achieved by adopting such policies. Furthermore, if the EU wants to encourage third countries to host refugee populations while still keep some credibility, the EU cannot only respond to requests made by states that use threatening strategies. The EU needs to also reward good behaviour. Studies have shown that threats (or blackmailing) are effective (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019a; İçduygu and Üstübcü 2014; Greenhill 2010, 2016; Tsourapas 2019), and this implicitly suggests that the EU is motivated by limiting migration. I argue, that the EU decision-makers also have other considerations that impact their decision making. Under the specific conditions presented below, I argue that policies that are perceived as morally justifiable are more motivating to the EU than threats are.

First, migration policy has to be perceived as a common issue, shared by the host state and the EU for threats to be efficient. Direct migratory pressure on the EU is most often the cause of migration being viewed as a common issue (Boswell 2003; Lavenex and Kunz 2008), but politicisation of migration policy could occur even without migratory pressure. For a policy to be perceived as morally justified, however, the EU must also view migratory pressure on host communities outside their own borders as a problem, even if this problem is not directly related to migratory pressure on their own territory. Because the EU is often unwilling to alleviate the burden by accepting migrants and refugees themselves due to political constraints, they lose moral standing and reputation both internally and internationally. This can

potentially be somewhat restored by offering other compensation to host countries and to refugees living there.

Second, the credibility of threats matter. Tsourapas (2019) hypothesises that the host states perception of their geo-political importance vis-à-vis the donor state partly explains whether they pursue a black-mailing strategy or not. I argue that the EU's interpretation of the credibility of threats matter for whether or not they respond to them. Threats to mistreat refugees or to push them across borders will not persuade the EU if the EU does not believe that the host country is likely to do so. The credibility of threats can be informed by a top-down interpretation of threats, considering the host country's history of refugee policy, or it can take the form of a bottom-up interpretation taking in the current context in which the threat is made, such as domestic pressure in the host country, and if the country shares a border with Europe. If the host country does not share a border with the EU, and is unlikely to be able to directly cause increased migratory pressure towards the EU, threats will have little impact. Moral arguments, however, are not affected by distance to the EU.

Third, a pre-existing relationship of mutual trust is necessary for the EU to respond to moral arguments. Stutz (2023) uses qualitative comparative analysis to demonstrate that existing relations with third countries is the single most important factor in determining EU migration cooperation. The credibility of normative arguments is difficult to measure; therefore, a top-down interpretation of their credibility is crucial. The pre-existing relationship with the host country and the host country's track record in upholding its end of agreements informs the EU's interpretation of credibility. EU agreements with third countries in migration governance have taken the form of informal deals with a non-binding nature (i.e. Cassarino 2017; Poli 2020; Seeberg and Zardo 2020). The weak legal nature of these deals makes the credibility of the claims made by host countries arguably even more important in migration governance than in other issue areas where agreements are often more formalised and have legal consequences. Furthermore, if a deal is made on a normative basis, the consequences of failed agreement could negatively impact the normative standing of the EU, meaning there is a high cost associated with failure and, therefore, credibility and trust is essential. Moreover, requests from host countries often involve policies that will boost the economy of the host country as a whole and not just the refugee population. Such requests will be better received by the EU if the request is sent from a well-regarded country and even an ally, because it will be in line with EU interests to secure their economy regardless of their role as host country.

How the EU was motivated to use trade policy as a tool in refugee policy

In order to create policies that the EU could perceive as morally justifiable, there needed to be a clear linkage between refugee policy and the gains that Jordan sought. The Jordanian economy was negatively impacted by severe external shocks following the war in Iraq, the 2007 financial crisis, the Arab spring, and the subsequent civil war in Syria (European Commission 2018, 271; World Bank 2020, 42). Jordan had previously requested a relaxation of the rules of origin agreement that applies to their exports to Europe, to give them easier access to the European market. This request had been rejected by the EU, in part because of the European principle of treating its neighbouring

countries equally in trade policy, which makes the EU reluctant to grant Jordan as one of many member of the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean Convention (PEM) an exception (interviews 4, 8, 13, 16). By 2015 the economic situation in Jordan was dire, they had a consistently high fiscal deficit since 2011 (World Bank 2020, 110; World Refugee & Migration Council 2021, 4). Jordan had received humanitarian aid and funding from the international community since they started receiving refugees from Syria in 2011, but by 2015 they were experiencing donor fatigue (interviews 6 and 18). This situation prompted a new approach to secure benefits from the international community according to a senior government official in Jordan; by linking the dire economic state of Jordan to their role as host state they could ask for trade benefits (interview 18). This linkage had already been made strategically in domestic politics in Jordan. The government blamed refugees for the economic troubles they were experiencing in order to avoid looking inwards on their own (mis)handling of the economic crisis (interview 18). This issue-linkage could be used vis-à-vis the EU to morally justify a similar trade agreement to the one Jordan benefitted from with the US. The US offered Jordan a relaxation of the rules of origin as part of the Middle East peace process, which caused a boom in exports to the US (Temprano-Arroyo 2018). The idea was that, under the circumstances of the Syria crisis, they could create a similar agreement with the EU. Trade concessions would be a way to ensure that the external assistance Jordan would receive during the migration crisis would benefit the country as a whole and not just the refugee population (interview 7).

A formal request was made from the government of Jordan to then EU Trade Commissioner Malmström, in December 2015, and this request initiated the process that resulted in the EU-Jordan Compact. They asked for a relaxation of the rules of origin that applied to Jordanian exports to the EU, in order to boost Jordan's exports and thereby creating additional employment opportunities for Syrian refugees and Jordanians alike (EU-Jordan Association Council 2016). The policy was framed in a way to secure Jordan's ability to provide jobs for Syrian refugees, rather than Jordan saying they would not integrate Syrians unless they were given trade benefits. This is an example of a 'plus sum game' (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019a) where the EU is encouraged to facilitate the implementation of policies that Jordan are proposing, but that also benefit the EU. EU decision makers argued that economic development of Jordan was indeed necessary for Jordan to be able to continue and deepen the integration of Syrian refugees into their labour market. A participant from Jordan explains the idea for the Compact as the following:

How can we sustain the support to Syrian refugees, but also have Syrian refugees also become [...] more integrated in Jordanian society and Jordanian economy? To help the country and its development as a whole. (Interview 16).

This framing was mirrored among EU decision-makers: 'So, it is a win-win: I open up my market, but you have to help me financially and to help the companies to have an easy access to the European market' (Interview 12). The dire economic situation in Jordan was heavily leveraged by the Jordanian negotiators to secure external support (interview 18). From the EU perspective it was recognised that the Jordanian labour market was strained, and that the absorption capacity was low, and that trade flexibilities could help facilitate labour integration of Syrian refugees (interviews 4, 10). At the same

time European decision makers recognised that Jordan used the Syria crisis to attempt to replicate the trade deal they had with the US:

Certainly, they were looking into the example of this successful US-Jordan agreement on rules of origin and they were hoping on being able to duplicate this success with some help from the Syrian refugees. (Interview 2)

The issue-linkage that Jordan provided was completely necessary in an instrumental way, according to the EU decision makers. Because the EU was reluctant to provide exceptions to the PEM system, which Jordan was a part of, the EU could only offer something that was limited in scope and time and only applicable to Jordan (interviews, 2, 8).

One thing that we wanted to be particularly mindful is to avoid doing something vis-à-vis Jordan that would immediately lead to request by other countries in the region which is the reason why we insisted to Jordan that we understood that there were particular circumstances arising from the refugee crisis, but that any scheme that we would develop would have to have very clear rationale linked to the employment of refugees. (Interview 8)

Not creating precedent in the PEM system was important to Europe, because countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, which belonged to the PEM, were a threat to the European textile industry. The norm in EU trade policy is universalism, and in order to provide Jordan with an exception they had to make it very specific and make it apply only for a limited time and only to businesses that employ a minimum share of Syrian refugees.

The EU perceiving Jordan's request as morally superior to the EU-Turkey Statement

Jordan had started issuing work permits for Syrian refugees even before the formal adoption of the Compact (EU-Jordan Association Committee 2018). The EU wanted Jordan to continue this behaviour: 'Now the question is how we can encourage and promote this positive policy of Jordanians to continue hosting the Syrian refugees? So, the EU had to make an effort' (interview 12). Participants from Jordan's claim that Jordanian openness towards Syrian refugees made it easier for the EU to have confidence in Jordan (interview 16). This supports the notion that the moral standing of Jordan was important in the negotiations with the EU. European policy makers confirm this, saying that it would have been difficult to refuse the request from Jordan, given that their idea was mutually beneficial and, moreover, given Jordan's openness to refugees:

We could not say no to the Jordanians. I mean they came up with – which was certainly very innovative – this type of win-win situation: I am ready to host, but at the same time I need some compensation in terms of socio-economic development. (Interview 12)

What Jordan was doing, opening up for refugee populations, is exactly the behaviour that the EU is attempting to encourage other countries to do with conditional development policies. It was difficult for the EU not to grant Jordan this, just because they were already doing it without the EU's encouragement (interviews 1, 7, 9, 12). There was very little pressure in the form of threats from the side of the Jordanians, unlike the situation in Turkey. In fact, if anything, the Turkey deal boosted the moral of the arguments of Jordan in the eyes of the EU decision makers. Representatives from Jordan recognised that other countries such as Turkey put pressure on the donor communities in 'unethical

ways' and furthermore, the fact that the EU responded to such pressures was a bad signal to countries like Jordan (interview 16): 'what kind of message are we sending to the world? Are we rewarding a model like Myanmar, are we rewarding a model like Turkey? Or are you rewarding a model like Jordan?' (Interview 16). Jordan strategically distanced themselves from the Turkish approach of blackmail. The deal with Turkey made it politically very difficult for the EU to refuse Jordan's legitimate request for assistance. According to EU policy makers the Turkey deal was used as an argument by Jordanians: 'they used to say: well to Turkey you give billions and billions. And here you negotiate with us for each and every Euro'. (Interview 15). European decision makers confirm that this argument was efficient:

Look, when a country is officially hosting 650.000 refugees through UNHCR numbers, while at the same time the EU was negotiating a deal of 6 billion Euro with Turkey, it was difficult to argue differently. (Interview 12)

Jordan achieved a good negotiating position through moral arguments. First, by showing openness to refugees, in line with European values, and second, by distancing themselves from states that contrast with the values that the European decision makers want to uphold. Already in March 2015, the King of Jordan made a speech to the European Parliament where he highlighted Europe's commitment to global development, the economic situation in Jordan and how Jordan, despite its scarce resources, has lived up to its moral obligations towards refugees in the region (European Parliament 2015). He concluded the speech with 'Your support sends a message, not only to my people, but all those who seek to move forward in peace and moderation: Europe is with you'. (European Parliament 2015). The speech blatantly plays to the normative aspirations of the EU and that helping Jordan is a way to boost this reputation.

First condition: a common issue

For Jordan, having influence over refugee populations only becomes a source of influence in external relations if external actors care about this issue. At the time when Jordan proposed the Compact idea, the EU was experiencing a political crisis, while attempting to limit migration into Europe. Jordan was aware of the political climate in the EU and recognised that the EU interest was to keep migrants in the Syrian neighbourhood (interview 16, 18). At the same time, Europe was having a debate on refugees' rights (interviews 1, 6). Jordan perceived that the refugee issue was an embarrassment for the EU (interview 18, 19). The request from Jordan was timely because it appealed to domestic pressures in European member states and the progressive European institutions, while simultaneously appealing to the more protectionist voices, as it offered a way to shift the pressure abroad (interview 4). It became a solution to overcome organised hypocrisy (Lavenex 2018). Thus, the EU Trade Commissioner responded positively to Jordan's request and the EU-Jordan Compact was beginning to take form. This EU decision to move forward with the Compact idea was motivated by internal pressure within the Commission and the EEAS, but not so much external pressure from Jordan (interviews 1, 4, 7, 13). The timing was extremely important according to several participants from the EU and some even suggested that had the request from Jordan come only months later, the outcome would have been very different (interview 5). This underlines the importance

of migration being perceived as a common issue in order for a third countries to be able to leverage their position to gain benefits. Furthermore, it demonstrates that politicisation of refugee policy in donor states can be leveraged by third countries, not only through threats, but also by appealing to the rights-based discourse in the donor states.

However, well after the European migration crisis, in 2018, there was a re-negotiation of the Compact in which the initial conditions for the trade concessions were further relaxed. Following a disappointing status report in 2017, by which time only three Jordanian companies had been able to export under the scheme, Jordan requested that the Compact be reviewed and that additional flexibilities be added (Jordan Times 2018, interview 8). This initiated much more strained internal negotiations on the EU side than when the compact was initially launched (interview 5). This round of negotiation took place after the state of emergency linked to migration had passed, and a much wider relaxation of the rules of origin was on the table. The EU very publicly made commitments to Jordan at the London Conference in February 2016. In the re-negotiation, the EU's ability to live up to the commitments, and to be a credible player in the international community, was made a key argument: 'Because it was considered to be an important, but also visible sign of the EU's help. And of the realisation of the commitment from the Compact and from the London conference' (Interview 2). Jordan also argued that it would be in the EU's best interest to live up to their commitments from a reputational perspective (interview 18):

So, the re-negotiation was not an ask from the Jordanian government, more a wake-up call from the Jordanian government, to say: hey, do you really want to celebrate something that is not yielding any benefits? So, for the EU - out of their interest - it would not have looked good if they don't change it. (Interview 16)

While the politicisation of migration policy in Europe was necessary for the creation of the Compact, it was not necessary to further expand the Compact during the re-negotiation. Through the failed implementation, the Commission also realised that the original agreement had been too restrictive for companies to actually be able to benefit from it (interview 4). Furthermore, the EU needed to make the Compact work in order to redeem their international standing as key actor in response to the Syria crisis. There is an element of path-dependency when morally justified migration policies are set up, making politicisation less crucial in securing longevity.

Second condition: the credibility of threats

In addition to perceiving Jordan's request as morally justifiable and mutually beneficial, the EU also recognised several threats in Jordan's arguments (Tsourapas 2019). Shortly before the major donor conference in London in February 2016, the King of Jordan participated in a BBC interview where he stated that the infrastructure in Jordan was under tremendous pressure and that 'the dam is going to burst' (BBC 2016). According to the EU decision-makers, they were aware that Jordan incorrectly highlighted the refugees as the main cause of the economic state of the country (interview 1). The analysis in the EEAS was that the huge deficit in Jordan was an unpopular issue and it was easier for Jordan to blame the refugees both internally vis-à-vis their own population and towards the international community (interview 1). The EU recognised the dire economic state in Jordan but traced its origin to before the influx of Syrian refugees

(interviews 4, 5, 10). The EU did not find this threat credible, and so it did not affect their decision making towards Jordan in a positive way.

Another dimension of the tactic to exaggerate the burden the refugees had on their economy was to inflate the refugee numbers (Tsourapas 2019, 469). The EU decision makers were aware that for every public meeting with the EU, Jordan had their own official numbers which they would raise 'which were not collaborated by any hard data' (interview 1). The EU made it part of their strategy not to oppose Jordan on refugee numbers and to try to avoid the topic all together 'We don't oppose them on this, we just try to avoid the problem' and 'this is a little tricky and we don't want to antagonise them with this' (interview 1). If anything, the strategy of inflating the refugee numbers strained the negotiation and made the process more difficult. Jordan officials confirm that this strategy was also used in the past with the Iraqis, but that by 2015 it was not efficient anymore (interview 18). Consistently, the EU representatives interviewed referred to UNHCR numbers when addressing the numbers of Syrians in Jordan, signalling that the inflated numbers Jordan provided were not believable. The EU decision-makers referred to how Jordan had a history of exaggerating refugee numbers, most notably with the Iraqi refugee population (interview 1). Exaggerating the number of refugees and the impact of the refugees on the infrastructure and economy of Jordan was part of Jordan's approach, however, it did not have an effect on the outcome because the EU did not respond. It seems like the Jordanian government also realised this 'by 2015 Jordan realised that all the lying will not get them more money' and so they changed their approach into proposing policies that would be mutually beneficial (interview 18).

Furthermore, Jordan was not in a position to make threats about forcibly moving refugees to Europe and this had implications for the decision-making process (Tsourapas 2019). According to EU diplomats, Jordan was angry about the Turkey deal. Sometimes Jordanian officials would jokingly suggest that they too could somehow threaten to send these refugees to Europe and be rewarded with 3 billion Euro. And the European diplomats could jokingly reply that 'Okay, you don't have borders with the EU, so how will you send them?' (interview 15) thus signalling that any such threats were not believable. Jordan's inability to make such threats meant that the moral argument of providing refugees with rights became their main strategy.

The whole debate was a lot of appreciation of the work that was done by Jordan in hosting the refugees. And, actually, very few refugees from Jordan ended up in Europe because the journey to Turkey and then later on to Europe by crossing the sea was not easy for a Syrian refugee in Jordan. (Interview 12)

An important implication of the lack of credibility of threats of forced movement is that on the EU side, the Directorate-General for Migration and Home affairs (DG HOME) was not involved in the policy making process. DG HOME is considered a less liberal, and more protectionist and conservative actor in EU migration policy (interview 3, 7). Several European decision makers underline that DG Home was instead focused on the border countries such as Turkey, which more directly impacted refugee numbers in Europe (interviews 3, 7, 10). Focused on Jordan were parts of the Commission, which are more inclined to provide assistance to the European neighbourhood and more concerned with international standing, such as the EEAS, DG NEAR, DG ECFIN and DG ECHO (interviews 9, 11, 13). The Compact was decided at the Supporting Syria Conference 2016 in

London, which was hosted by the EU and the UN. This launched a conference series on the future of Syria, co-hosted by the UN and the EU, and held in Brussels semi-annually (interviews 4, 10). It was a strategic choice for the EU to name the agreement with Jordan ‘a Compact’ because it signalled that the EU was in line with the UN Global Compact on Refugees, and furthermore, that the EU and UN shared objectives and instruments (interview 10). The Jordan Compact was spearheaded by the EEAS and DG NEAR, and it became a tool to boost the international standing of the EU in international cooperation. Had Jordan shared borders with the EU, other actors within the Commission with different motivations would be active in the policy making and, arguably, a different strategy on the part of Jordan would have been successful.

Third condition: pre-existing relationship with Jordan

What Jordan proposed was a policy that would benefit the Jordanian economy as a whole. Several EU participants underlined that it was very much in the interest of Europe to keep Jordan out of economic disaster. This meant that there was a keen interest to assist Jordan financially, in addition to wanting to assist the refugee population. One European decision maker underlined how strategically important Jordan is to the EU ‘even up until now it remains one of the closest partners in the region for the European Union, for NATO and for the US as well’ (interview 15). The fact that Jordan was a close and strategic ally, experiencing economic hardship and turmoil, was an important incentive for the EU to react.

Furthermore, Jordan benefitted from a very good reputation and it was believed that they would live up to their commitments: ‘There was a good track record and we knew that the Jordanians would certainly try to deliver on their side of the bargain’ (interview 15). One EU decision maker compared Jordan’s ability to implement policies to that of, for example, African countries, arguing that Jordan was a much more efficient and trustworthy partner (interview 15). This reputation for efficient implementation and ability to provide assistance to refugees was instrumental because ‘It helped to make sure that there was support in the member states, that there was support in the European Parliament’ (Interview 5).

Because the Compact was used to boost the EU’s standing in the international community, it was important that Jordan was deemed a credible actor that lived up to the normative standards that the EU was trying to portray by supporting Jordan. The EU-Jordan Compact was viewed as a political signal from the EU, saying that the EU believes in Jordan and Jordan’s ability to live up to their commitments to the Syrian population (interview 5). In other words, had the EU not had a high level of trust in Jordan, they would not have been able to grant Jordan’s request. One EU decision maker highlighted that even though the Compact was an extremely novel idea, it was comparatively easy to get the EU interests aligned because everyone was keen to help Jordan, and this is not always the case when the EU negotiates with third countries (interview 5).

Conclusion and discussion

This paper has taken the EU-Jordan Compact negotiations as a point of departure to explore how the strategy of refugee host states are perceived by donor states, and how

the strategies of the former translate to policies of the latter. The case demonstrates how donors assess the credibility of threats and of normative claims made by host countries and that this assessment is essential in how donors respond. Furthermore, it argues that given the EU's protectionist policies in migration governance, they are in a difficult negotiating position vis-à-vis hosting states, making it difficult for them to turn down what they perceive as legitimate requests.

The paper puts forward scope conditions for when donors are likely to respond to threats or moral arguments. If migration is considered a common issue because there is migratory pressure on the donor state, threats can be efficient. For a policy to be perceived as morally justified, however, the donor state must also view migratory pressure on host communities outside their own borders as a problem. Because the EU was unwilling to alleviate the Syria crisis by accepting refugees, while at the same time had strong interests in refugee rights, they depended on other countries to host refugee populations. This meant that the EU perceived Jordan's request as justified and that the EU owed them compensation. For threats to have effect, they need to be perceived as credible. The threats that Jordan made were not considered credible by the EU because of the geographic context. This impacted what EU actors were involved in the policy making process and which interests and motivations that played a part. For moral arguments to be efficient, the donor state must have pre-existing good relationship with the host state. This is necessary for the donor to be able to trust that they will deliver on morally justified policies. Because Jordan was perceived as an ally and an actor that efficiently implemented policies, it was easy to convince EU stakeholders. Furthermore, the EU believed that Jordan, an important ally, was in severe economic trouble and stabilising the Jordanian economy was therefore in line with EU foreign policy, and this provided additional incentive to grant Jordan's request.

Jordan's approach in migration diplomacy is well-documented, however, it has thus far only been explored from the Jordanian side (Tsourapas 2019; Turner 2015; Seeberg 2020; Seeberg and Zardo 2020). This analysis demonstrates that even though Jordan has been successful in achieving significant gains by leveraging the refugee crisis, not all aspects of the Jordanian strategy have been successful. For example, inflating refugee numbers and exaggerating the effects of the refugees on the economy was not deemed credible by EU negotiators. Furthermore, the normative aspects of Jordan's strategy have had significant effect, such as distancing themselves from the blackmailing approach of Turkey and creating policy solutions that appeal to the refugee-rights values of the EU. The EU found Jordan's request for trade concessions morally justified because of the openness Jordan had shown to the refugees in a context where the EU felt morally inferior. Previous research has highlighted how the migration crisis of 2015 made European states vulnerable to coercive behaviour from host or transit states, such as Turkey (Greenhill 2016; Gürkan and Coman 2021). This paper has demonstrated how the crisis and the EU's response to it has weakened the perceived moral standing of the EU in migration governance, and furthermore, that this has impacted how EU decision makers view requests from host countries as legitimate and justified.

Relating the findings of this paper to the EU externalisation literature, it raises the important lesson that EU policies do not derive from internal EU dynamics alone. The policy process should be understood as an interaction involving external actors, and

the strategies of these actors vastly impact the policy process. The EU is held accountable for its protectionist policies when negotiating with external actors and this puts them in a compromised situation where they are more likely to find external actors' claims justifiable. When researchers explain EU external policy responses in different third countries and at different points in time, the strategies of these countries should be an important part of the analysis as should the EU's perception of these. In addition, this paper has shed light on the hereto unaccounted for normative motivations of EU decision-makers in external migration policy and where the focus is not on remote control of migration (see table 1; Niemann and Zaun, 2023, 11). This finding demonstrates the necessity of looking beyond policy output when making claims about the motivations and interests of decision-makers in migration policy.

Moreover, this paper opens up a new path for migration diplomacy research. The migration diplomacy research agenda has moved from a Euro-centric (and North American) focus to increasingly incorporating the strategies of the Global South. For example, Brumat and Freier (2023) have demonstrated that states in South America responded to restrictive EU policies by adopting legislative liberalisation. It is now time re-examine the Global North migration management policies with awareness to how the Global South has acted. Future researchers are encouraged to employ this approach in their studies of European and North American migration policies, and to take the literature down the unexplored path of Western counterstrategies to refugee host states' migration diplomacy policies.

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