



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

Corso di Laurea magistrale  
in Comparative International Relations

TESI DI LAUREA

THE CASE OF GIULIO REGENI  
BETWEEN COMMERCIAL RELATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Anno Accademico 2021/2022



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## Introduction

L'omicidio del dottorando italiano Giulio Regeni il 25 gennaio 2016 è uno dei capitoli di cronaca più terribili dei nostri tempi e ha scosso profondamente l'opinione pubblica nazionale e internazionale. La ricerca di dottorato di Giulio sui sindacati indipendenti egiziani per l'Università di Cambridge lo portò a lavorare direttamente sul campo e a trasferirsi al Cairo, in Egitto, per un periodo di sei mesi, da settembre 2015 a marzo 2016. Il 3 febbraio 2016 il suo corpo fu trovato senza vita sul ciglio dell'autostrada tra Il Cairo e Alessandria, mostrando chiari segni di tortura al punto che anche la madre ebbe difficoltà a riconoscerlo. Le autorità del Cairo ostacolarono le indagini e negarono ogni accusa fin da subito dopo la scoperta del cadavere. Parlarono di un incidente stradale, di una rapina finita male, di un'aggressione spinta da una presunta relazione omosessuale o da questioni di droga, tutte ipotesi che si rivelarono incompatibili con la tremenda immagine di tortura fornita dall'autopsia. Le indagini italiane rivelarono inoltre che il ricercatore era stato segnalato come spia all'Agenzia per la Sicurezza Nazionale egiziana e perciò tenuto sotto sorveglianza dalla polizia e dai servizi segreti prima della sua scomparsa. Con il passare degli anni, Il Cairo si è rivelato sempre meno collaborativo con le autorità italiane. Quando la Procura di Roma chiese il rinvio a giudizio di quattro membri dei servizi di sicurezza egiziani, l'Egitto si rifiutò di fornire le informazioni necessarie riguardanti l'indirizzo di domicilio degli imputati. Per questo motivo, dopo ben sette anni di indagini, non è stato ancora possibile inviare loro le notifiche degli atti e quindi procedere con il processo, iniziato il 14 ottobre 2021.

Dopo aver fornito una prima panoramica sul caso di Giulio Regeni, ho ritenuto indispensabile dedicare il secondo capitolo del lavoro alla storia recente della Repubblica Araba d'Egitto, in modo da esaminare le circostanze economiche, politiche e sociali in cui ha avuto luogo il tragico evento. L'Egitto in cui viveva il ricercatore italiano era un paese segnato da una situazione interna instabile, soprattutto alla luce della Primavera Araba del 2011 e della conseguente caduta del regime di Hosni Mubarak. Le prime elezioni libere e democratiche d'Egitto vennero poi vinte da Mohamed Morsi, che tuttavia venne deposto da un colpo di stato militare guidato dal generale Abdel Fattah al-Sisi appena un anno dopo. A Morsi successe lo stesso al-Sisi, che da lì a poco instaurò un regime di controllo totale della sfera politica, di corruzione e di dura repressione dell'opposizione attraverso arresti, torture, sparizioni forzate e uccisioni che purtroppo caratterizzano ancora oggi il paese egiziano.

Nonostante l'instabile situazione interna e le continue violazioni dei diritti umani, il ruolo del paese arabo è di particolare importanza nell'area mediterranea e nello scenario internazionale. Molti paesi occidentali, tra cui l'Italia, mirano a mantenere un'influenza sull'Egitto per interessi commerciali, legati soprattutto alla presenza di grandi giacimenti di risorse naturali, e per il ruolo centrale che il paese gioca nella regione, in particolare rispetto ai temi della gestione dei flussi migratori e della lotta al terrorismo. Inutile dire che un episodio come l'uccisione di un ricercatore italiano al Cairo ha rappresentato uno shock alla luce degli stretti rapporti bilaterali tra Italia ed Egitto. Uno degli obiettivi di questo elaborato, in particolare del terzo capitolo, è infatti quello di capire se e come queste relazioni commerciali e diplomatiche siano cambiate nel periodo successivo al 25 gennaio 2016. Per rispondere a queste domande ho basato tale elaborato sui dati forniti da varie riviste di geopolitica e da siti governativi come InfoMercatiEsteri, una piattaforma del Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, e l'Ambasciata italiana al Cairo.

Il quarto e ultimo capitolo si concentra sulla questione dei diritti umani, in particolare il divieto di tortura e la libertà di ricerca, e mira a capire come l'uccisione del dottorando italiano sia stata gestita a livello nazionale, sia in Egitto che in Italia, e internazionale. Il caso di Giulio Regeni ha suscitato un acceso dibattito sul coinvolgimento del governo egiziano nella vicenda e sui successivi insabbiamenti da parte della polizia e dei servizi di sicurezza egiziani. Le reazioni hanno assunto numerose forme, da dichiarazioni di istituzioni internazionali e organizzazioni non governative a iniziative online di singoli cittadini da tutto il mondo, tutte volte a perorare la causa di Giulio e a sottolineare che non si è trattato di un omicidio isolato, ma che è stato parte di un contesto più ampio di torture, sparizioni forzate e uccisioni che avvengono abitualmente nel territorio egiziano. Al fine di analizzare questi aspetti ho fatto affidamento sulle informazioni trovate in numerosi articoli di giornale e siti web di organizzazioni per i diritti umani come Amnesty International e Human Rights Watch.

Ciò che è evidente finora è che, nonostante le continue violazioni dei diritti umani perpetrate dal regime di al-Sisi, l'Italia si dimostra riluttante ad esercitare un'adeguata pressione sul Cairo. I rapporti tra Egitto e Italia si sono addirittura intensificati negli ultimi anni, soprattutto alla luce delle scoperte di nuovi giacimenti di gas da parte della multinazionale italiana Eni in acque egiziane. Questo ha sollevato molte critiche da parte della comunità internazionale, che si batte costantemente chiedendo verità e giustizia e a cui è ormai giunto il momento di dare una risposta.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The case of Giulio Regeni**

#### **1.1 Giulio Regeni and the PhD**

Giulio Regeni was an Italian university researcher, born in Trieste on 15 January 1988 and raised in Fiumicello Villa Vicentina, a town in the province of Udine (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy). Those who knew him speak of him as a very enterprising boy: from the age of 12 to 14 he had been mayor of the boys in his municipality, he attended the classical linguistic high school in Trieste and then left Friuli Venezia Giulia on a scholarship to spend the last three years of high school in New Mexico, in the United States, at the Armand Hammer United World College of the American West. During his years in New Mexico, he developed a passion for journalism and started writing for the Trieste-based magazine Konrad. Passionate about Middle Eastern studies and able to speak Arabic and English to perfection, in 2011 he earned his undergraduate degree in Arabic and Politics at the University of Leeds, United Kingdom, while in 2012 and 2013 he won two prizes in the international ‘Europe and Youth’ competition promoted by the Regional Institute for European Studies for his research and in-depth studies on the Middle East. He then worked at the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), a specialised agency of the United Nations that deals with the increase of industrial activities in member countries. Finally, the United Kingdom, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in Humanities at the University of Oxford and began a PhD in Development Studies at Girton College, University of Cambridge.

The PhD Giulio was attending focused on the activities of the Egyptian independent trade unions. His research was based on street vendors, whom he defined as “the only force left in civil society” and who have gathered to fight government repression and to claim the extension of salary rights and benefits reserved for public companies. As a possible source of disorder, trade unionists have been kept under strict control by the Egyptian regime and have been the target of restrictive trade laws since the Tahrir Square uprisings in January 2011. In addition to outlawing small unions with less than 150 members, thus favouring the government-aligned Egyptian Trade Union Federation (EUTF), and having at least 15,000 people tried by a

court martial<sup>1</sup>, the Egyptian government has infiltrated dozens of informants and security forces within them to make them the ‘eyes’ of the regime. Street vendors’ stalls crowded the spaces of central areas such as the Ahmed Helmy market and Taalat Harb, a commercial district near Tahrir Square, but also peripheral and densely populated areas such as Helwan, south of Cairo, and the large municipality of Giza. Between 2016 and 2017, however, they have been diverted to less popular neighbourhoods of the city, where selling and surviving is not so easy. An influential member of the Egyptian trade union scene, who preferred to remain anonymous given the current climate of strong repression, explained that:

The leadership of the autonomous trade unions has been dismantled, as has almost the entire autonomous union system. Indeed, today, there is hardly anyone left to take care of the rights, real and true, of workers in Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

The research on the independent trade unions took Giulio Regeni to the American University in Cairo, Egypt, on 9 September 2015. Thanks to the help of Noura Wahby, an Egyptian friend who met during the PhD in Cambridge, Giulio Regeni managed to find accommodation and rent a room in a flat shared with a German girl and the Egyptian lawyer Mohamed El-Sayed. During his time in Cairo, he met the trade unionist Mohamed Abdallah, whom he asked to be accompanied to the city’s markets to meet street vendors. The trade unionist initially refused the request, as he thought it was too risky to be seen in the company of a Westerner who “asked questions.”

Giulio Regeni started to collaborate with various newspapers, describing the difficult situation of the trade unions after the massive wave of privatisation of the last period of the Mubarak era and after the Egyptian revolts in 2011. Among the others, he wrote an article<sup>3</sup> under the pseudonym Antonio Drius, published by the independent Near East News Agency (Nena News), which concerned the wave of strikes started in October 2011. The article highlighted how every form of dissent (from the working-class to entrepreneurs, from street vendors to public employees) was associated with terrorism and was therefore easily repressed

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<sup>1</sup> Bagnoli, L., «Egitto e diritti umani: lavoratori nel mirino di Al Sisi», Osservatorio Diritti, 28 January 2019, <https://www.osservatoriodiritti.it/2019/01/28/egitto-diritti-umani/>, accessed 17 June 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Curzi, P., «Egitto, attivisti in manette e sindacati smantellati: la stretta di Al Sisi dopo la morte di Giulio Regeni». *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 30 June 2019, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/06/30/egitto-attivisti-in-manette-e-sindacati-smantellati-la-stretta-di-al-sisi-dopo-la-morte-di-giulio-regeni/5290452/>, accessed 30 May 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Drius, A., «L’Egitto degli scioperi cerca l’unità sindacale». *Nena News*, 14 January 2016, <http://nena-news.it/legitto-degli-scioperi-cerca-lunita-sindacale/>, accessed 30 May 2022.



by the Egyptian security forces. When conducting his research and writing his articles, Giulio certainly did not imagine that he himself would be a victim of this brutal repression.

## **1.2 Giulio's disappearance and the discovery of the corpse**

At 7.41 p.m. on 25 January 2016, Giulio sent a text message to his girlfriend informing her that he was going out. That night, he was supposed to meet Gennario Gervasio, professor of Economics at the British University of Cairo, for a friend's birthday. Giulio was heading for the Dokki metro station, not far from his home, when he disappeared. At 9 p.m., noticing that Giulio did not show up at the appointment and that he was no longer answering his mobile phone anymore, his friends immediately contacted the Italian Embassy in Cairo. Gervasio soon started to become highly worried: it was a particularly sensitive and dangerous date, namely the fifth anniversary of the Tahrir Square uprising. The regime of el-Sisi feared spontaneous demonstrations by the opposition; therefore, it carried out thousands of searches to block initiatives and protests against the government and imposed a semi-curfew prohibiting any gathering of more than three individuals. Another thing that alarmed Gervasio was an episode that occurred on 11 December 2015: Giulio was at a coordination assembly between independent trade unions, convened in Cairo by the Centre for Trade Unions and Workers Service (CTUWS), when he noticed that an unknown woman wearing a veil was taking photographs. The researcher had the perception that these were taken to card the participants, especially him, the only foreigner attending the assembly.

The researcher's disappearance was soon reported by his friend Noura Wahby on her Facebook profile. His friends, acquaintances and colleagues, as well as many users, launched a hashtag on Twitter: #whereisgiulio. The news was made public on 31 January 2016 by the then Italian ambassador to Cairo Maurizio Massari:

After Gervasio's phone call, I immediately contacted the head of our intelligence office in the embassy and asked him to activate his Egyptian interlocutors. He replied shortly afterwards that, following some initial verifications, the local counterparts had no information on Giulio Regeni. On the morning of 26 January, we intervened several times with the competent Egyptian authorities [...] to start the search and to find our compatriot as soon as possible. On the 26th, [...] I officially informed the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through a formal note verbale. At the same time, I also solicited the Egyptian Minister of State for Military Production, Mohamed El-Assar, [...] [who] assured me that he would personally take care of it and promptly

inform the Minister of the Interior, Magdi Abdel Ghaffar, to make him aware of the sensitivity and importance of the case. In addition, I also informed and requested the intervention of the then Egyptian ambassador in Rome, Amr Helmy.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation published a statement, which read:

The Italian Embassy in Cairo and the Farnesina are following the case of Giulio Regeni, the 28-year-old Italian student who mysteriously disappeared on the evening of 25 January in the centre of the Egyptian capital, with the utmost attention and concern. [...] Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni had a telephone conversation a short while ago with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry, to whom he firmly requested the utmost commitment to track down his compatriot and provide any possible information on his condition. [...] The Embassy in Cairo, from the first hours of the disappearance, immediately activated direct communication channels and a close coordination activity with all the competent Egyptian Authorities, and is waiting to receive elements on the dynamics of the disappearance. The Embassy and Farnesina are also in close contact with Giulio's parents.

The search for the researcher continued until 3 February 2016, when his lifeless body was found on the outskirts of Cairo, in an embankment along the highway connecting the capital city to Alexandria. His corpse was naked and horrendously mutilated. Traces of physical torture were immediately apparent: it had bruises and abrasions, more than two dozen bone fractures, including seven ribs, all fingers and toes broken, as well as the legs, arms and shoulder blades. Giulio also had five broken teeth and a number of stab wounds, even on the soles of his feet. Cigarette burns were also present on his body. The cause of death was attributed to a fractured cervical vertebra, probably due to a violent blow to the neck. The autopsy, 225 pages long, also revealed a brain haemorrhage. "When we entered the morgue, the only thing I said to Claudio was: 'Yes, it's him, I can see him from the tip of his nose.' Otherwise, he was no longer our Giulio," told Giulio's mother, Paola Deffendi.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Youtube channel of Senato Italiano, Conferenza stampa sulla vicenda di Giulio Regeni, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQaUQ4n6UQc>, accessed 10 June 2022.

### 1.3 Red herrings and ostracism

I must say that what was most striking, and worrying as the hours and days passed, was the lack of concrete answers from the Egyptian authorities, and this despite my insistence and the excellence of bilateral and even personal relations with the Egyptian authorities that existed at all levels. I remember that at the time, Italy and our Embassy in Cairo were among the countries with the highest profile, both in terms of the intensity of diplomatic relations and political relations at the highest level, as well as economic relations.<sup>5</sup>

The first act of ‘cooperation’ between Italy and Egypt was the formation of a joint investigation team. On 5 February 2016, a team of seven members of the Italian judicial police, composed of personnel from the Special Operations Group (ROS) of the Carabinieri Corps and the Central Operations Service (SCO) of the State Police, arrived in Cairo to investigate the case. Nevertheless, the team had to carry out its activities in the absence of investigative powers, since it was not an investigative pool where Egyptian and Italian judicial police officers operated on an equal footing. However, despite these limitations, the Egyptian government immediately declared itself willing to cooperate in the investigation and promised to deliver to the Italian authorities a series of documents to shed light on the event. What was instead delivered to them gave the measure of the effective collaboration that Egypt was willing to provide.

The one of the 7-8 April 2016 was the first summit between Italian and Egyptian investigators. It took place on the premises of the Police Academy in Via Guido Reni, Rome, with the aim to work together to find definite answers to the case of Giulio Regeni. Representing Italy were the top executives of the SCO and the ROS, the Chief Prosecutor of Rome Giuseppe Pignatone and the Public Prosecutor Sergio Colaiocco. The summit turned out to be a substantial failure and represented a clear demonstration of the Egyptian authorities’ total lack of cooperation: what Egypt had promised was a 2,000-page dossier containing all the information related to the case, but what was instead handed over was a bundle of documents that were already known or had already been presented to Italy. The Rome Public Prosecutor’s Office was then waiting for a lot of other material, in particular telephone cell data and surveillance camera videos from subways and shops in the neighbourhood where Giulio lived and disappeared; Cairo promised to deliver them but never made them available. According to

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<sup>5</sup> Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into the death of Giulio Regeni, Hearing of the Permanent Representative of Italy to the European Union, former Italian Ambassador to Cairo from 2013 to 2016, Maurizio Massari. Sitting No 5 of Thursday, 27 February 2020.

Deputy Attorney General Mostafa Soliman, such a request was contrary to Article 57 of the Egyptian constitution, which protects the privacy of emails, phone calls and all sorts of communications. In the meantime, several reassurances were coming from Egyptian authorities: in an interview with the al Arabiya television station, Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry reiterated that the case had been dealt with “in a transparent manner. Egypt is intent on maintaining its close ties with Italy. We have opened our doors to Italian investigators to allow them to take part in the investigation.”<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, these words proved to have little credibility as the investigation of the Regeni case was entrusted to General Khaled Shalabi, Senior National Security Officer, convicted by the Alexandria Criminal Court in 2003 for falsifying a police report and torturing and killing a man (and whose one-year sentence was suspended).

From the very beginning, the investigations into Regeni’s kidnapping and death have been subjected to numerous red herrings by the Egyptian authorities. General Khaled Shalabi immediately declared that the Italian researcher had been the victim of a car accident, later rectified and stated that the murder was likely committed for personal reasons. The Egyptian police then claimed that the murder may have been for drug-related reasons (but the family members and the autopsy clarified that the researcher did not use drugs). The el-Sisi government accused the Muslim Brotherhood of having kidnapped Giulio and committed the murder. Egyptian investigators claimed that there were no images of surveillance circuits either outside or inside the metro station where the researcher disappeared (those images, however, were overwritten because the Egyptian authorities never tried to retrieve them). As the case became more and more suspicious, Egyptian Interior Minister Magdi Abdel Ghaffar denied any involvement of the security apparatus in Giulio’s case: “What we read in the newspapers are insinuations. We did not know Regeni”<sup>7</sup> (a year later, it would turn out that the National Security, the Egyptian secret service reporting to the Interior Minister, had been following Regeni for at least a month before his disappearance). The Egyptian media have also repeatedly reported that Regeni was killed because he was a foreign intelligence spy or a political agitator, most probably working for the British secret services. It was Mohammed Abdallah, head of the autonomous Cairo hawkers’ union, who accused Giulio of being a spy. Proof of the trap is a

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<sup>6</sup> «Regeni, seconda giornata vertice Italia-Egitto», *Agenzia Giornalistica Italia*, 8 April 2016, [https://www.agi.it/cronaca/caso\\_regeni\\_al\\_via\\_seconda\\_giornata\\_vertice\\_italia-egitto-678346/news/2016-04-08/](https://www.agi.it/cronaca/caso_regeni_al_via_seconda_giornata_vertice_italia-egitto-678346/news/2016-04-08/), accessed 8 June 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Parlamento Italiano, Doc. XXII, n. 78. Proposta di inchiesta parlamentare, [https://documenti.camera.it/\\_dati/leg17/lavori/documentiparlamentari/indiceetesti/022/078/intero.htm](https://documenti.camera.it/_dati/leg17/lavori/documentiparlamentari/indiceetesti/022/078/intero.htm), accessed 5 June 2022.

video shot by Abdallah himself with a micro-camera of the National Security Agency during his last meeting with Giulio on 7 January 2016, later transmitted by Egyptian investigators to Italian ones. In the video, the two talk about the project of the British Antipode Foundation, which had made available up to ten thousand pounds to conduct research in developing countries. It was precisely this money that precipitated the situation: initially, Giulio promised to donate it to Abdallah, but later, once he discovered that foreign funding for independent trade unions is forbidden in Egypt, he backtracked and severed relations with Abdallah. Since he insisted on receiving the money, claiming that he needed it because his wife was ill with cancer, the Egyptian union leader feared that Giulio would denounce him and that his double game would be exposed. He therefore contacted some agents of the Egyptian National Security Agency and sold Giulio as a spy for the British intelligence. In December 2016, in an interview with the Arabic edition of the Huffington Post taken up by *L'Espresso*<sup>8</sup>, Abdallah's words finally brought out the truth:

Yes, I denounced him and handed him over to the Interior. Any good Egyptian, in my place, would have done the same. [...] Giulio and I met six times. He is a foreign boy who asked strange questions and was with street vendors on the streets, questioning them on matters of national security. The last time I heard him on the phone was on 22 January, I recorded the call and sent it to the Interior. We cooperate with the ministry. They take care of us and it is automatic that we belong to them. When a policeman comes to celebrate with us at one of our weddings, it gives me more prestige in my area.

The most shocking red herring by the Egyptian authorities occurred on 24 March 2016, two months after Regeni's disappearance. That day, the Egyptian police killed a group of four or five men in a shootout, accusing them of being the killers of the Italian researcher as they possessed a bag containing various items belonging to him – his passport, his cards of the University of Cambridge and of the American University of Cairo, his credit card and a piece of hashish, which seemed to support the thesis of a drug-related killing. The Egyptian Ministry of the Interior published a post on its official Facebook profile, stating that the criminal gang was specialised in kidnapping foreign citizens to extort money from them. Egyptian television and newspapers then showed the image of a silver tray on which these objects were placed, publicly announcing the guilt of these men and declaring the Regeni case solved. It however

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<sup>8</sup> Maarad, B., «Il capo del sindacato degli ambulanti: “Orgoglioso di avere denunciato Regeni”», *L'Espresso*, 28 December 2016, [https://espresso.repubblica.it/internazionale/2016/12/28/news/il-capo-dei-sindacati-egiziani-orgoglioso-di-avere-denunciato-regeni-1.292283?ref=HEF\\_RULLO](https://espresso.repubblica.it/internazionale/2016/12/28/news/il-capo-dei-sindacati-egiziani-orgoglioso-di-avere-denunciato-regeni-1.292283?ref=HEF_RULLO), accessed 23 May 2022.

turned out that the men were innocent and that it was a set-up by the Egyptian police forces themselves. Rasha Tarek accused the police of having covertly put Giulio's items and documents in a bag in her house and of having murdered her father, husband and brother, the alleged criminal gang, to make people believe that they were guilty.

That bag was my brother Saad's. The wallet with the inscription 'Love' is my mother's. The money was the fruit of the sale of a car to a guy in Dubai. The police put the documents among our things during the search. It couldn't have been anyone else. And the proof is that among the items is my brother-in-law's wallet: he had it with him when they killed him.<sup>9</sup>

The authorities answered that the man possessed Giulio's wallet because he had robbed him in the street. But wouldn't Giulio have reported the theft or at least told of it? Moreover, the phone records handed over by the Egyptian government to the investigators were instrumental in discovering that the leader of the criminal gang was more than 100 kilometres away from Cairo on the days of Regeni's disappearance.

In police terms it is called deception, but this is a state intrigue that sees an entire government mobilised to cover up the evidence of what happened. And it does so with fake scenarios, conjuring up shadows of 'terrorism' or 'espionage plots'. [...] the reality that is being concealed is a heinous state murder with a dozen thugs who "did all the evil in the world" and snatched Giulio Regeni's life.<sup>10</sup>

All the red herrings and the accusations of an alleged involvement in the world of drugs, of Giulio's supposed bad companies and of his presumed affiliation to the secret services were easily disproved by the Italian investigations, from first to last.

#### **1.4 Shadows over the University of Cambridge?**

Giulio Regeni's research was supervised by Professor Maha Abdelrahman of the University of Cambridge. Maha Abdelrahman is an Egyptian academic, expert in political science, politics of development and sociology. She was associate professor of sociology at the

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<sup>9</sup> Mazza, V., «Caso Regeni, "Solo bugie dai poliziotti: così ci hanno infilato in casa i documenti di Giulio", *Corriere della Sera*, 16 April 2016, [https://www.corriere.it/esteri/16\\_aprile\\_10/solo-bugie-poliziotti-76451c82-ff5a-11e5-a032-8e8dfe3b8a86.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/esteri/16_aprile_10/solo-bugie-poliziotti-76451c82-ff5a-11e5-a032-8e8dfe3b8a86.shtml), accessed 23 May 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Arcuri, C. (2020), *Giulio Regeni. Ricatto di Stato*, Roma: Castelvecchi Editore, p. 9.

American University in Cairo and later moved to the Centre of Development Studies of the University of Cambridge, where she currently coordinates research activities with regard to sociology and development disciplines in Middle Eastern countries. Among her publications are *Civil Society Exposed: The Politics of NGOs in Egypt* and *Egypt's Long Revolution: Protest Movements and Uprisings*, where she addressed social issues in Egypt, in particular during the Mubarak dictatorship. After the tragic murder of Giulio Regeni, despite the close professional ties with him, the professor showed little willingness to recount details, answered interrogations with many “I don't know” and “I don't remember” and closed herself in a suspicious silence. In an interview by the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, the then Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi described as “inexplicable” the University of Cambridge's lack of cooperation with the Italian judicial authorities:

I asked British Prime Minister Theresa May [...] to use her authority to ask the Cambridge teachers to cooperate with the Italian judicial authorities. [...] An Italian boy died, tortured. We owe his family the truth. And anyone who has even a piece of it must help us, now.<sup>11</sup>

The first time the tutor officially testified before prosecutor Sergio Colaiocco was on 9 January 2018, almost two years after Giulio's murder. Nonetheless, the Rome Prosecutor's Office deemed her answers unsatisfactory and ordered the British authorities to search the university lecturer's home and office, from which mobile phones, sim cards, personal computers and various documents were seized. Abdelrahman's rare statements present many inconsistencies with what has later emerged from the investigation and from Giulio's correspondence, retrieved in Italy from his computer. A first inconsistency concerns the subject of Giulio's research. According to the professor, the interest in the Egyptian independent trade unions came from the researcher himself. However, a conversation that took place on Skype between Regeni and his mother Paola on 26 October 2015 revealed how it was professor Abdelrahman who insisted that he delve into that specific theme; Giulio was instead of the opinion that dealing with Egyptian trade unions, the soul of the Tahrir Square uprising, was too sensitive and dangerous at such a turbulent time in the African country's history. Through the letters rogatory of the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office it emerged that the tutor even used to insist that her students request field interviews in Cairo to gather material on autonomous trade

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<sup>11</sup> Foschini, G., «Renzi: su Regeni troppi Silenzi. Cambridge collabori», *La Repubblica*, 1 August 2016, [https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2016/08/01/news/renzi\\_su\\_regeni\\_troppi\\_silenzi\\_cambridge\\_collabori-145161919/](https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2016/08/01/news/renzi_su_regeni_troppi_silenzi_cambridge_collabori-145161919/), accessed 14 June 2022.

unions; some of these students were expelled from the country by the Egyptian authorities and had to seek psychological care due to the traumas they suffered. The versions do not even match when it comes to Giulio's supervisor during his period of research in Egypt, namely Rabab el-Mahdi, lecturer at the American University of Cairo. El-Mahdi's career as an activist put her in the crosshairs of the el-Sisi regime. As he confessed to a friend, this worried Giulio a lot: having such an exposed personality as a supervisor could have been dangerous given the country's political situation. However, the lecturer gave a completely different version of the facts, claiming that Giulio deeply admired el-Mahdi's work and hence wished to proceed with her as a supervisor.

Who decided on the research theme? Who defined the questions to be asked to the autonomous hawkers' unions interviewed by Regeni? Where are the reports containing the answers to these interviews? To these questions Abdelrahman has not yet wanted to give a clear answer. This has created many shadows on her, who has even been accused of having used Giulio to carry out intelligence work for the British secret service, of supporting the revolutionary spirit of Egypt's independent trade unions and of having close ties with the Muslim Brotherhood.

On the other hand, the University of Cambridge has strongly denounced the "shameful campaign" which has been created against the tutor, responding in particular to the accusations of Matteo Renzi and to the article published by *La Repubblica* on 2 November 2017.<sup>12</sup> In her defence, the university claimed that the heavy accusations and the huge media attention on the case threw Abdelrahman into a period of severe emotional distress, which led her to shut herself even more away and to move, together with her husband, to the Netherlands.

I've been heard by the magistrates for the first time in Italy on the day of Giulio's funeral.<sup>13</sup> It was one of the most difficult days of my life and the one when I first met his family and friends, with whom I had been in communication when he disappeared. I had no idea that I would be heard, there had been no warning. I was approached immediately after the service, stopped at the cemetery and told that I had to be heard by the magistrates. There was no translator, one of the policemen did the translation. They asked me many questions and I was very distressed. I've never seen a transcript of this testimony, so I don't remember everything. I gave wrong information, I was so overwhelmed by the circumstances that I didn't have, so

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<sup>12</sup> Bonini, C., Foschini, G., «Omicidio Regeni, le bugie di Cambridge sui rischi di Giulio», *La Repubblica*, 2 November 2017, [https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2017/11/02/news/regeni\\_cambridge-179993364/](https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2017/11/02/news/regeni_cambridge-179993364/), accessed 14 June 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Giulio Regeni's funeral was held on 12 February 2016.



offhand, the clear and basic data to give. I could not remember names, nor the exact dates and so on. As I said, I didn't know there was a transcript in Italian and I was told 'It says this and this, please sign it.' So, I signed it.<sup>14</sup>

In September 2021, the professor at the University of Cambridge broke her silence and declared her willingness to cooperate with the authorities. She told it to the Italian parliamentarians of the commission of enquiry, who were travelling to Cambridge and London to sensitise the British authorities to engage in the search for truth in the Regeni case.<sup>15</sup> Despite that, many aspects remain a mystery.

What is certain is that Giulio was a simple researcher trying to write his doctoral thesis, like many other students in the world. If he had been a spy carrying out intelligence work for the secret services, he would have been warned and protected by some apparatus.

## **1.5 The reconstruction by the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office**

Article 10 of the Italian Code of Criminal Procedure regulates jurisdiction for offences committed entirely abroad and provides that jurisdiction is determined by the place of residence, abode, domicile, arrest or surrender of the defendant. However, when jurisdiction cannot be determined, it goes to the tribunal, to the assize court in Rome or to the judge of the place where the public prosecutor's office that first entered the offence in the appropriate register is located. The legislator has therefore assigned jurisdiction to the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office.

The preliminary investigation into Giulio Regeni's death started in February 2016, in the immediate aftermath of the discovery of the researcher's lifeless body. Although restrained by red herrings and ostracism, the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office, supported by the Italian State Police and other law enforcement agencies, has managed to reconstruct Regeni's last movements and acquaintances, as well as the dense network of control that had been created around him by the Egyptian National Security Agency. In December 2017, the Prosecutor's Office handed over to its Egyptian counterpart a detailed report on Giulio Regeni's case, which

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<sup>14</sup> Rosini, G., «Regeni, la versione della prof di Cambridge davanti alla Commissione d'inchiesta: "Non l'ho mai spinto a fare ciò che non voleva". E respinge le accuse di scarsa collaborazione», *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 4 December 2021, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2021/12/04/regeni-la-versione-della-prof-di-cambridge-davanti-alla-commissione-dinchiesta-non-lho-mai-spinto-a-fare-cio-che-non-voleva-e-respinge-le-accuse-di-scarsa-collaborazione/6413469/>, accessed 14 June 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Guerrero, A., «Regeni, parla la tutor di Cambridge: "Pronta a collaborare con la giustizia"», *La Repubblica*, 3 October 2021, [https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2021/10/03/news/regeni\\_parla\\_la\\_tutor\\_di\\_cambridge\\_pronta\\_a\\_collaborare\\_con\\_la\\_giustizia\\_-320635404/](https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2021/10/03/news/regeni_parla_la_tutor_di_cambridge_pronta_a_collaborare_con_la_giustizia_-320635404/), accessed 14 June 2022.

included the names of nine officers from the National Security suspected of being involved in the kidnapping. It was then ascertained that the researcher's movements were reported to the Egyptian police by the trade union leader Mohamed Abdallah, who accompanied Giulio to meet the street vendors belonging to the independent trade unions and with whom Giulio believed he was cultivating a good relationship. Giulio was even betrayed by people very close to him: his housemate and lawyer Mohamed El-Sayed, who allowed a National Security officer to enter Regeni's room, and the friend Noura Wahby, who reported every conversation with the Italian researcher to a National Security informant. This shows how the encirclement and terror of the Egyptian intelligence apparatuses made use of people whom Giulio believed to be friends.

A fundamental contribution to the investigation was made by the reconstructions of the various testimonies of friends and acquaintances of Giulio, as well as of people who decided to remain anonymous for security reasons. In a hearing before the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the death of Giulio Regeni, Deputy Prosecutor Sergio Colaiocco exposed several relevant testimonies he managed to collect thanks to the ROS Carabinieri, the SCO State Police and the work of the Public Prosecutor. Two witnesses reported on some circumstances preceding Regeni's disappearance. Witness Alfa claimed to have had a conversation with Giulio's housemate Mohamed El-Sayed on 23 January 2016, who complained about the problems the Italian researcher was causing: the police had searched their place and asked the housemate not to mention it. The same El-Sayed told witness Beta that, in mid-December 2015, he had been contacted by the doorman because a National Security officer had asked him for a copy of Giulio's passport. The housemate even took the official's telephone number and called him on the evening when Giulio disappeared – an information later confirmed by the phone records. Witness Gamma reported a conversation overheard in August 2017: a man from the Cairo secret services complained with an officer of Nairobi, Kenya, about a doctoral student in Cairo who had fomented people to start another revolution and revealed that the secret services had started wiretapping him, discovering about the birthday party in Tahrir Square on the evening of 25 January 2016. This witness also confirmed that he heard the name of the secret agent during the conversation, namely Ibrahim Magdi El-Sharif, who told his colleague that he had hit "Giulio Regeni." Other two people testified some episodes occurred after Giulio's abduction. Witness Delta revealed to have seen the Italian researcher at Dokki's police station, a district in Giza, around 9 p.m. on 25 January 2016, accompanied by four people in civilian clothes and then taken elsewhere in a Fiat 123. Finally, witness Ipsilon claimed to have seen him in room number 13 of the National Security Agency headquarters, where foreigners suspected of conspiring against the Egyptian state are taken, on 28 or 29 January. His body

showed evident signs of torture.<sup>16</sup> Thanks to these witnesses, in particular those who claim to have seen Regeni in the hands of Interior Ministry officials, the preliminary investigation into Regeni's death was closed on 10 December 2020.

The Egyptian authorities announced the official closure of the investigation in December 2020 too. Nonetheless, the Egyptian Public Prosecutor's Office sent a note on its Facebook platform writing that the Egyptian authorities were substantially outraged by the activities of the Italian counterpart. According to the Egyptian magistrates, "a trial in Italy would be unjustified [...] given the death of the accused." Moreover, they stated that:

Unspecified parties hostile to Egypt and Italy want to exploit the case of Giulio Regeni to harm relations between the two countries. This would be proven by the place where the body was found and the choice of both the day of the kidnapping and the day the corpse was found, which occurred precisely during an Italian economic mission in Cairo.

It has emerged that all suspicions presented by the Italian investigating authority are the result of erroneous, illogical and unacceptable conclusions from internationally established criminal law standards.

These statements confirmed once again the attempt by the Cairo authorities to portray themselves as innocent and to attribute what happened to individuals who would have acted on their own.

## **1.6 The trial**

On 25 May 2021, the Judge for Preliminary Hearings (GUP) of Rome, Pierluigi Balestrieri, accepted the request of the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office and sent to trial four officers of the Egyptian National Security Agency, namely:

1. Tariq Sabir, General of Police at the Department of National Security;
2. Uhsam Helmi, Colonel on duty in the Directorate Passports and Immigration, formerly with the National Security Directorate;
3. Athar Kamel Mohamed Ibrahim, Colonel and Director of Inspection in the Security Directorate of Wadi al-Jadid, former head of the judicial investigations in Cairo;

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<sup>16</sup> Agostini, M., «Giulio Regeni sequestrato e torturato per nove giorni da agenti egiziani: la procura di Roma chiede il processo», *Dire.it*, 10 December 2020, <https://www.dire.it/10-12-2020/215305-giulio-regeni-sequestrato-e-torturato-per-nove-giorni-da-agenti-egiziani-la-procura-di-roma-chiede-il-processo/>, accessed 08 June 2022.

4. Magdi Ibrahim Abdelal Sharif, Major serving in the National Security.

These were charged with aggravated kidnapping, conspiracy to commit aggravated bodily harm and conspiracy to commit aggravated murder. The GUP set the first hearing of the trial for 14 October 2021, which took place in the bunker room of the Rebibbia prison in Rome. Before the Third Court of Assizes were Giulio Regeni's parents, Paola and Claudio, his sister, Irene, and their lawyers, Alessandra Ballerini and Francesco Romeo. The researcher's parents joined the proceedings as civil plaintiffs<sup>17</sup>, as well as the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The trial seemed to finally ascertain the responsibilities of the Egyptian authorities after more than five long years of investigations and deceptions. However, the four defendants were not present in court. This represented a big setback: the third section of the Rome Assize Court decided to suspend the first hearing and return the acts to the judge for the preliminary hearing, since it was not proven that the four defendants were aware of the trial against them and therefore that they voluntarily decided not to appear at the trial. Indeed, the Egyptian government refused to disclose the home addresses of the four National Security officers, making it impossible to serve them the essential documents to bring them to the attention of the trial.<sup>18</sup>

The GUP of the Court of Rome, Roberto Ranazzi, set the following hearing to 10 January 2022. On that occasion, he granted another three months for new searches to be carried out on the Egyptian defendants to be concluded by the second hearing on 11 April 2022. The ROS Carabinieri were allowed to analyse law enforcement databases, telephone directories and social networks, but also to gather information through confidential sources. Nonetheless, the GUP has once again ordered the suspension of the proceedings against the four defendants due to Egypt's refusal to cooperate with the Italian magistrates in the service of the essential documentation. The ROS Carabinieri have managed to trace the address of the four men's place of work, but according to the Code of International Procedure, domicile is required for notifications. The magistrate has hence adjourned the trial until 10 October 2022. If no new elements are presented, the trial will be postponed again. Here are the words pronounced by Alessandra Ballerini, lawyer for the Regeni family, at the end of the hearing on 11 April 2022:

Today was yet another mockery. We take note of the Justice Ministry's failed attempts to obtain concrete cooperation from the Egyptian authorities and we are saddened and outraged by the response of the el-Sisi regime's prosecution, which continues to make a mockery of our

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<sup>17</sup> Civil plaintiffs are aggrieved parties who intend to bring their claim for compensation or restitution before a criminal court.

<sup>18</sup> Under Italian law, it is not possible to judge a defendant who is not aware of his charges. For this purpose, the suspect must elect a domicile or must choose the place where he wishes the documents to be served.

institutions and our system of law. We ask that President Draghi, sharing our indignation, demand, without ifs and buts, the elections of domicile of the four defendants. [...] To stand idly by now, to allow the el-Sisi regime to block this painstakingly educated trial, would allow the murderers of Giulio to go unpunished and would be tantamount to being their accomplices. Our government has a duty to vigorously demand justice.

The Regeni family appealed to the Draghi government:

The violation of the protection of life, liberty and integrity of citizens abroad [...] constitutes serious damage to the image and prestige of the Italian State in its function of protecting its citizens. Therefore, given the proclaimed Egyptian obstructionism, we demand from our government the necessary, timely and proportionate reaction.<sup>19</sup>

The Rome Public Prosecutor's Office has appealed against the GUP's order by turning to the Corte di Cassazione, the Italian Court of Appeal, claiming that the four accused officers are "falsely unaware." According to the prosecutors, however, to claim that the defendants are falsely unaware requires that the documents be served to the defendants themselves. The decision to annul or not the judge's ruling that the trial could not go ahead will be taken at the hearing on 15 July 2022, where it will be made an attempt to break an absurd procedural deadlock that has been going on for too long.

Further hindering the smooth progress of the trial is the Egyptian judicial system: in Egypt, the competence of the Regeni case lies with the General Prosecutor's Office, for which, however, the case is closed and no further investigation is possible. All these red herrings and obstacles to the work of the Italian judicial authorities seem to constitute an admission of guilt by the regime of Abdel Fatah el-Sisi.

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<sup>19</sup> Sofia, A., «Regeni, processo sospeso. Famiglia: "Ennesima presa in giro da Al Sisi. Ora Draghi intervenga e pretenda elezione di domicilio degli imputati"», *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 11 April 2022, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2022/04/11/regeni-processo-sospeso-famiglia-ennesima-presa-in-giro-da-al-sisi-ora-draghi-intervenga-e-pretenda-elezione-di-domicilio-degli-imputati/6556252/>, accessed 08 June 2022.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Egypt's political context before and after 25 January 2016**

#### **2.1 The Egyptian Revolution and the Arab Uprisings**

The day of Giulio's disappearance represents a significant date in recent Egyptian history: 25 January 2011 marked the beginning of the Egyptian revolution, when popular protests started filling streets and squares against the 30-year regime of President Hosni Mubarak. These exploded on the wave of the protests that broke out in Tunisia on 17 December 2010, when a young street vendor called Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire to complain about the continuous harassment by the local police forces. The riots that ensued in Tunis prompted authoritarian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to abdicate his position in January 2011 and to flee to Saudi Arabia, paving the way for a delicate process of 'democratic transition'. Activists in other countries of the Middle East and North Africa were inspired by the success of this regime change and gave birth to several other grassroots movements in January 2011, seeking increased social freedoms and greater participation in the political processes and giving birth to the well-known phenomenon which was later called 'Arab Spring'.

25 January is not a random date for the Egyptian country: it is the National Police Day, a holiday that commemorates the several Egyptian policemen injured and killed by the British troops garrisoned on the Suez Canal in 1952. Since the police represented the Egyptian instrument of repression, the choice to start the protests on 25 January 2011 was of extraordinary success. In Egypt, the uprisings found their roots in the Mubarak regime, representing the result of a tension that had been building up over the previous decade. First, people protested against the authoritarian, repressive and corrupt way in which their country was governed. The revolts were indeed directed against the lack of social, political, and civil liberties, against corruption and against the harsh repression exercised by the Egyptian police, an apparatus of the Ministry of the Interior and therefore under the control of the Egyptian state. Protesters also complained about the state of emergency in place since the Six-Day War of 1967, under which any public demonstration was harshly repressed and declared illegal and all kinds of opponents to the regime were arrested and detained under highly degrading conditions.

The riots were also addressed to the law on political parties, according to which every new party had to be approved by a committee appointed by the Egyptian government, and the decades-long mandates of Egyptian President Mubarak. Secondly, protests exploded because of the process of economic liberalisation that had been implemented in Egypt and due to the increasingly aggressive penetration of a globalisation managed by a few. Liberal reforms led to high rates of unemployment, a dramatic increase in the cost of consumer goods and the consequent dismantling of the country's welfare system. This situation was then exacerbated by the global economic and financial crisis of 2007, which particularly brought down many of the least developed countries of the world. Within this negative social and economic framework, general discontent grew quickly and people started to take to the streets to make their voices heard.

If 25 January saw tens of thousands of citizens demonstrating in the squares of Cairo, a few days later, on the 28th, massive demonstrations paralysed the centre of the capital, with Tahrir Square as epicentre and symbol of the protests. Within a few days, the square housed a camping area, sanitary facilities, information stands and spaces for the media and created a collective space for discussion. Various fringes of the Egyptian population participated in the riots, from young people to the radical left wing and the democratic segments of the middle class, as well as workers and small farmers. All of them started expressing their concerns through strikes, demonstrations, rallies in public spaces, occupation of workplaces and communication through new media, participating in a mobilisation that was unprecedented in terms of visibility, dissemination, and time duration.

The 2011 uprisings gained visibility and a strong media resonance throughout the world. What differentiated them from the other protests was the widespread diffusion of electronic devices and the role played by social networks, which managed to inform the world quickly and instantaneously and to create a public opinion not controlled by the regime. This online mobilisation was primarily organised by youth organisations. In Egypt, the most important one was the *6 April Movement*, which, together with the *Kifāya!* movement and the Muslim Brotherhood, launched a massive media campaign on Facebook to invite people to take Tunisia as an example for rebellion and participate in the mobilisation of 25 January. The riots became so effective and impactful that President Mubarak ordered an Internet blackout to silence them; they however continued to grow, spreading through the streets of the Arab country and between the bullets of the Egyptian police. The same Tahrir Square became indeed the scene of violence and fierce repression by the Egyptian police forces, who responded to the demonstrations with tear gas, water bombs and riot gear.



On 11 February 2011, after 17 days of protests, Vice-President Suleiman announced Mubarak's resignation and handed over the transitional government to the army, precisely to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).<sup>20</sup>

## **2.2 Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood**

After Mubarak's resignation, the SCAF restored order and immediately promised a move towards a democratic model of state, proposing a popular referendum on constitutional reforms. 41 percent of the eligible voters participated in it and more than 77 percent supported the referendum package, which included presidential elections to be held within six months. In June 2012, the leader of the Freedom and Justice Party Mohamed Morsi won the first ever free and democratic elections of the Arab Republic of Egypt. Freedom and Justice was an Islamist, formally independent political party that boasted of close ties with the Muslim Brotherhood. Morsi's election hence represented the highest moment in the Brotherhood's history, which had the opportunity to reach the Egyptian government for the first time since its foundation in 1928.

Together with the 2011 uprisings, which managed to put an end to the 30 long years of Mubarak's regime, these elections represented a strong hope for democracy for many Egyptians. However, the one carried out by the SCAF was not a full-fledged transition to democracy: the military purged key elements of the previous regime of Mubarak and sought to consolidate its grip on power in order to receive greater economic privileges, using a populist and often highly xenophobic rhetoric through state-controlled media in order to strengthen its legitimacy. While the SCAF had promised a transition from a military to a democratic system, the army signed an agreement with 13 political parties to postpone the elections to 2013. In addition to this, President Morsi did not manage to solve the economic and social problems of the country, which was hardly hit by price hikes on basic necessities, gas and electricity blackouts in many neighbourhoods and difficulties in securing petrol supplies. Many Egyptians also complained about the constitution approved during the Muslim Brotherhood government, considered too Islamising because of its explicit reference to Sharia law. Morsi was hence accused of mismanaging the economy, of producing policies that excluded opposition and of embodying the authoritarian symbol that he was supposed to eliminate. This situation brought about political disorder and weakness and led to the interruption of Morsi's presidency on 3 July 2013, dismissed by a coup d'état carried out by the Minister of Defence and Commander-

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<sup>20</sup> The SCAF had previously been convened only on two occasions: during the Six-Day War in 1967 and during the Yom Kippur War in 1973, namely in times of national crisis.

in-Chief of the Armed Forces, General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Violence began to spread through the Egyptian streets, putting pro-Morsi militants against anti-Morsi protesters and leading the army to clash with both of them. In some cases, the military forces committed violations that even exceeded those of the Mubarak era, hence perpetuating the tradition of repression from which the 25 January protesters had fought so hard to free themselves. According to Amnesty International, the SCAF also employed armed *baltagiya*<sup>21</sup> to assault protesters, a well-known tactic dating back to the Mubarak era.<sup>22</sup> The terrible wave of repression ended on 14 August 2013, with the massacres at al-Nahda Square and Rabaa al-Adawiya Square, where the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi's supporters were gathering to denounce the coup. Human Rights Watch denounced the raids as "crimes against humanity" and as "one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history."<sup>23</sup>

Morsi was imprisoned, condemned to hard labour, and tried on various charges for which he was convicted over the years. He was accused of having ordered the arrest and torture of many protesters hostile to his government, incited the murder of some opponents, led a group against the law (the Muslim Brotherhood) and leaked documents regarding Egypt's domestic and foreign policy to Qatari intelligence during his term. The heaviest sentence came in 2015, when he was given death penalty for having conspired with foreign armed groups and militants to escape from prison in 2011, in particular the Palestinian fundamentalist organisation Hamas and the Lebanese paramilitary organisation Hezbollah; the Egyptian Supreme Court, however, overturned the sentence and decided that the trial had to be held again. Arrest warrants also reached the main leaders of the Islamist movement; among the first are Saad el-Katatni, leader of the Freedom and Justice Party, and the supreme leader and the number two of the Muslim Brotherhood, respectively Mohammed Badie and Mohamed Rashad al-Bayoumi. The arrests of other associates of the Muslim Brotherhood were around three hundred, with the motivation of having incited violence, disturbed the general security of Egypt and undermined peace.

Morsi and the other exponents of the Muslim Brotherhood were detained in a special section of the Tora Maximum Security Prison in Cairo, nicknamed Scorpion Prison, known for

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<sup>21</sup> Baltagiya are gangs that the Egyptian security services could not contain and hence informally hired to handle political violence. The secret services trained them, paid them well and allowed them to carry out every kind of abuse in order to deter, arrest and punish the opponents of the regime.

<sup>22</sup> «Egypt: Military rulers have 'crushed' hopes of 25 January protesters», *Amnesty International*, 22 November 2011, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2011/11/egypt-military-rulers-have-crushed-hopes-january-protesters/>, accessed 4 May 2022.

<sup>23</sup> «Egypt: Rab'a Killings Likely Crimes against Humanity», *Human Rights Watch*, 12 August 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/12/egypt-raba-killings-likely-crimes-against-humanity>, accessed 23 June 2022.

housing political opponents and enemies of the regime and for the inhuman conditions in which these are detained. This special section was completed in 2014 by order of President el-Sisi himself, who aimed at creating a high-security area for the Muslim Brothers and at making the Egyptian public forget the fates of the Brotherhood leadership.

Morsi died of a heart attack during a session of his trial on 17 June 2019. The Muslim Brotherhood immediately talked about an ‘outright murder’, while Amnesty International denounced the mysterious circumstances in which Morsi was detained and died, asking for immediate and impartial investigation.<sup>24</sup> Human Right Watch, stated that Morsi’s destiny was foreseeable: his family reported that he was detained in solitary confinement without the possibility to speak to other inmates, that he was denied essential medical care and that he rarely had the possibility to communicate with them and his lawyer.<sup>25</sup>

### **2.3 The transitional government**

After the coup d’état deposed President Morsi, General el-Sisi installed a transitional government led by head of the Supreme Constitutional Court Adli Mansor. As of December 2013, he soon outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood and ordered the arrest of a large number of its members and leaders, charging them of disturbing security and peace. This was added to a series of measures against members of the civil society and of organisations such as the 6 April Movement, measures that limited the right to demonstrate, allowed the presidency to dismiss university rectors (considered hotbeds of extremism) and restricted the activity of foreign NGOs in the country. Opponents started organising protests throughout the Egyptian country and immediately started to be repressed by the Egyptian army, which began firing on pro-Morsi protesters (not only Muslim Brothers’ supporters, but also journalists, bloggers, and workers) and to evacuate Islamist sit-ins by force. In the meantime, the Egyptian authorities hid what happened and denied the involvement of the army in the repression, pointing their finger at police forces. After the Rabaa al-Adawiya and al Nahda sit-in clearing, for instance, occurred on 14 August 2013, the final death toll amounted to around 300 but the Egyptian Ministry of Health only denounced six deaths and 26 injuries.

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<sup>24</sup> «Egypt: Authorities must order immediate investigation into death of former President Mohamed Morsi», *Amnesty International*, 17 June 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/egypt-must-investigate-mohamed-morsi-death/>, accessed 11 June 2022.

<sup>25</sup> «Egypt: Independently Investigate Morsy’s Death», *Human Rights Watch*, 17 June 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/17/egypt-independently-investigate-morsys-death>, accessed 11 June 2022.

It was during this transitional government, on 24 November 2013, that the Anti-Protest Law was passed and started representing one of the main instruments of legal control in the Egyptian country. The law severely prohibits demonstrations and protests called without the authorisation of the executive, with penalties up to 5 years in prison, hence justifying the restriction of freedom of a large number of Egyptian protesters. Soon after its enactment, it was recorded an unprecedented increase in the number of people disappeared and tortured in prison, many of whom were arrested without specific charges.

Meanwhile, interim President Mansour announced the road map for the following months: suspension and changes to the 2012 Egyptian Constitution, a referendum, and new elections by 2014. The referendum of 14-15 January brought to the adoption of the 2014 Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, which removed all Islamic references introduced by the previous Muslim Brotherhood-led executive, for instance banning religious parties and abolishing the articles concerning the role of religion in law and in the exercise of state power. It then reinforced the pre-eminent role of the armed forces: military courts acquired the competence to try civilians, the army obtained full budgetary control powers and the SCAF acquired autonomy in the appointment of the Minister of Defence.

## 2.4 Abdel Fattah el-Sisi

### 2.4.1 El-Sisi's elections in 2014

In March 2014, el-Sisi announced his candidature for the presidential elections of 26-28 May, where he obtained a landslide victory gaining more than 96 percent of the votes. The only other contender, leftist politician Hamdeen Sabahi, lost with only 3 percent, stating that “the election process in itself and the democratic goal in the election was violated and lacked impartiality.”<sup>26</sup> According to official data, the final turnout reached 47.5 percent, but only after the Egyptian government extended the vote to a third day, introduced a public holiday on the days of the election and threatened abstainers with a large fine.<sup>27</sup> On 8 June, with total control of the political field, el-Sisi officially took office as President of the Arab Republic of Egypt;

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<sup>26</sup> «Sisi elected Egypt president by landslide», *Al Jazeera*, 30 May 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2014/5/30/sisi-elected-egypt-president-by-landslide>, accessed 14 June 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Kingsley, P., «Abdel Fatah al-Sisi won 96.1% of vote in Egypt presidential elections, say officials», *The Guardian*, 3 June 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/03/abdel-fatah-al-sisi-presidential-election-vote-egypt>, accessed 15 June 2022.

as former Minister of Defence and Commander of the Armed Forces, his election symbolised a renewed intermingling of the Egyptian political and military elites.

#### 2.4.2 Security and the fight against terrorism

El-Sisi kept implementing his process of restoration began with the overthrow of Morsi, making national security and the fight against terrorism in the Middle East as the two bulwarks of his policy. This political agenda might represent a valid opportunity for Egypt both to enhance its role in the region and to play an active diplomatic part in international politics, presenting itself as a responsible interlocutor interested in restoring security and in fighting against the spread of jihadism. Indeed, Egypt managed to do so: in recent years, many European countries, such as Italy, have assigned the Arab nation the role of guarantor of stability in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East and have given it great strategic value both for its ongoing mediation role in the Arab Israeli conflict and for its commitment to the fight against Islamist terrorism. This approach is part of Italy's 'Mediterranean pivot' strategy, whereby the country has committed itself to playing a vanguard role in the European Union and NATO through bilateral partnerships with geostrategic countries such as the Egyptian one.

The Egyptian fight against terrorism, however, does not solely serve the purpose of repressing terrorist cells: el-Sisi's regime often uses it as an excuse to silence any form of opposition. First of all, the government has declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group, setting it on the road to complete political exclusion. For its supporters, the regime has ordered the death penalty, frozen assets including carts, land and companies, and seized or closed dozens of schools. Such repression also involves Islamists in general, but also liberals, communists, and progressives, as well as lawyers, journalists and bloggers, which agitate the masses and therefore threaten the stability of the country. The use of the terrorist threat as an excuse to circumvent constitutional freedoms intensified on 17 August 2015, when the Egyptian President issued a new anti-terror law<sup>28</sup> that provided for the establishment of special courts to speed up trials, toughened penalties for terrorism (including death penalty) and guaranteed legal protection for soldiers and law enforcement officers who used force in the exercise of their mission; it also introduced a minimum of five years of hard labour for those who use websites or social media to promote and broadcast 'terrorist' ideas and material.

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<sup>28</sup> Atlantic Council, Egypt's Anti-Terror Law: A Translation, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/egypt-s-anti-terror-law-a-translation/>, accessed 14 June 2022.

It is precisely in the name of this much-acclaimed fight against terrorism that states such as Italy politically and economically support authoritarian and repressive systems like the Egyptian one, keeping silent in front of their crimes. The European Union, for instance, has expressed its determination to co-chair the Counter-Terrorism Forum with Egypt, notwithstanding the severe human rights violations often justified in the name of counterterrorism.<sup>29</sup>

Until 2020, about 60.000 political prisoners have been subject to arrests, torture and killings by the Egyptian army and security forces. According to research by Amnesty International, in May 2020, at least 37 journalists were in prison for having exercised their right to freedom of expression. Many others were treated as terrorists and questioned about the sources and findings of their articles. A lot of newsrooms have been attacked or closed while hundreds of online news portals have been blocked. The same NGO reported that, in March 2020, a journalist who was questioning official data on COVID-19 was arrested by Egyptian security forces, charged with “spreading false news” and “joining a terrorist organisation.”<sup>30</sup> On 20 December 2021, Alaa Abdel Fattah, the best-known blogger of the Egyptian revolts, and his lawyer Mohamed el-Baquer were sentenced respectively to five and four years in prison, accused of “spreading false news” about the treatment of the detainees in Egyptian prisons. This “false information,” as it was called by the Misdemeanours Emergency State Security Court in Cairo, was undermining national security. That same day, the blogger Mohamed ‘Oxygen’ Ibrahim was sentenced to four years in prison for having criticised the government’s failure to respect social and economic rights.<sup>31</sup>

Such a harsh repression has led to the definitive rupture of the unity that the Egyptian people and the army used to cultivate during the previous presidencies. Indeed, during the Arab Uprisings, the Egyptian military used to participate actively in ousting the incumbent regime and in facilitating the transition to democratic elections. Moreover, every Egyptian family had a family member in the army, which was useful to maintain a solid relationship between the military and the citizens themselves. The rise to power of President el-Sisi led to the intensification of a clientelistic use of power and to the constitution of a kind of oligarchy, or

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<sup>29</sup> «Egypt: Civil Society Organizations Call on the European Union to Withdraw its Joint Candidacy with Egypt to Chair the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum», *Amnesty International*, 10 February 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/5230/2022/en/>, accessed 6 June 2022.

<sup>30</sup> «Egypt: End relentless attacks on journalists and other media workers», *Amnesty International*, 5 May 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/05/egypt-end-relentless-attacks-on-journalists-and-other-media-workers/>, accessed 11 June 2022.

<sup>31</sup> «Egypt: Sentencing of Mohamed El-Baquer, Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed “Oxygen”», *International Federation for Human Rights*, 7 January 2022, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/egypt-sentencing-of-mohamed-el-baquer-alaa-abdel-fattah-and-mohamed>, accessed 11 June 2022.

cartel, supporting the regime through the distribution of benefits to a supportive inner circle and the repression of dissidents.

### 2.4.3 The military system

The path of interdependence between the Egyptian state and the army in contemporary Egypt finds its roots in the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, also known as 23 July Revolution. On 23 July 1952, the Free Officers Movement, a clandestine group born within the Egyptian Armed Forces and led by Mohamed Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser, carried out a coup d'état and deposed King Farouk, who left Egypt with his family. This marked the beginning of a radical change in the country's history: for the first time since the time of the pharaohs, Egypt started being fully ruled by a government of Egyptians. The monarchy was officially abolished and, on 23 June 1956, Nasser became President of the Republic of Egypt.

The revolution brought about by the military apparatus' coup d'état was certainly not democratic: Nasser's personalistic conception of authority brought him to concentrate power in his hands and to share it with the three main pillars of society: the army, the intelligence and the cabinet committee. Nasser abolished the parliamentary system and brought everything back to the single party, namely the Arab Socialist Union. He instituted a very harsh and pervasive system of repression, censorship and control of the society, characterised by severe violations of human rights such as arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and episodes of torture. The whole governmental system functioned on the basis of co-optation, loyalty to the system and corruption, and from that moment on the country ended up in the hands of the military establishment. Indeed, the army entered into a dense network of privileges and started enjoying "a high degree of control over the economy, the bureaucracy, and the legal system."<sup>32</sup>

[...] the percentage of officers in cabinet positions ranged from 32 percent to 65 percent. Between 1952 and 1967, only one civilian ever held a top position in the republic. Of the 65 men who held political positions between 1962 and 1967, 27 were officers.<sup>33</sup>

In 1952, the Egyptian military had the strength to carry out a coup d'état: it possessed weapons and money both to control the media and make propaganda and to organise itself as a

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<sup>32</sup> Abul-Magd, Z., «Understanding SCAF», *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, 2012. <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/understanding-scaf/>, accessed 21 March 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Hashim, A.S., «The Egyptian Military, Part One: From the Ottomans through Sadat», *Middle East Policy*, 2011, p. 68.

structured political party. Moreover, since it was sufficiently hierarchised and bureaucratised, the army represented the sole apparatus to be able to maintain stability in the country. It therefore became the true political power of Egypt, as well as an instrument of external and internal deterrence and of improvement of the population's living conditions.

Nasser's successor Anwar Sadat embarked on a policy of marginalisation of the military, trying to replace them with professional and qualified technocrats. He privatised parts of the state-owned sectors that the military was previously dominating, opening doors to a rising number of capitalists and entrepreneurs, and therefore shifting from socialist central planning to free-market capitalism. Sadat made Egypt an ally of the United States and signed the 1978 Camp David peace accords, after which the Egyptian army lost its military function. However, the army started receiving substantial funding from the United States, money that was then diverted to the economy and made the Egyptian army an economic lobby.

With Hosni Mubarak's rise to power, the military returned to be an important actor of national unity and prestige. In order to maintain a close relationship with the military apparatus, the Egyptian president assured it great economic power and gave it a monopoly in various sectors, guaranteeing himself a real cartel of survival. This so-called military-industrial-business-commercial complex (MIBCC) has been defined as "a vast military-run commercial enterprise that seeps into every corner of Egyptian society, producing food [...], cement and gasoline, vehicles [...] and infrastructure."<sup>34</sup> As it has been previously analysed, this patronage system was among the primary factors that led Egypt to an uncertain political and socioeconomic period and to a phase of protests in the wake of the Arab Uprisings of 2011.

The free and democratic elections of 2012 were won by the first Egyptian president not coming from military circles: Mohamed Morsi. Nevertheless, since the 13 July 2013 coup d'état, Egypt has taken another militaristic turn led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and the army itself, which have restored some of the characteristics of the Egyptian regime of 1952 and have given the military an even stronger political and economic control over the country. The Ministry of Military Production has expanded its business to almost all economic sectors: both private and public companies, from factories to airlines and hotels, as well as insurance companies and banks, have started to be owned by personalities from the army or close to it, with the aim to keep under control economy and production. The military has started producing all kinds of items (from fertilisers to pasta, from electronic devices to cement) and obtaining multi-million-dollar contracts in the large infrastructure sector (it has indeed been entrusted

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<sup>34</sup> Hashim, A.S., «The Egyptian Military, Part Two: From Mubarak Onward», *Middle East Policy*, 2011, p. 109.



with the widening of the Suez Canal and with the construction of bridges, stadiums, hospitals and roads). El-Sisi has turned the members of the armed forces into a real caste: they possess high pensions, pay no taxes on medicines and luxury goods, and live in state-owned flats during the working year and in resorts during the holiday periods; the president's most trusted men even enjoy parliamentary immunity. Giving them benefits and control over the country's main economic sectors allows the Egyptian president to prevent any betrayal or lust for power. 2013 also saw a return of the Egyptian Police State:

A police state harsher in its repression and more hegemonic politically in comparison to the Mubarak era has been reconstituting itself under military suzerainty. Increasingly draconian laws, hypernationalist discourse, and the expanding role of the security sector and armed forces in all aspects of civilian life herald an even more authoritarian political order based on broader societal acceptance of the repressive practices of the state's coercive apparatus.<sup>35</sup>

Within the Egyptian security network, the police apparatus is in charge of the country's internal security, especially of the repression of demonstrations. This plays a liaison role with the intelligence, which aims at countering foreign espionage activities and to suppress subversive movements within the country. The intelligence's organisational structure is divided into three main bodies: the Homeland Security, the General Intelligence Directorate and the Military Intelligence and Reconnaissance Administration. Often referred to as the *Mukhabarat*, the General Intelligence Directorate controls, monitors and punishes opponents of the regime; anyone can be an agent of the Mukhabarat and report any criticism of the government or any attempt to oppose it or change it, while suspects are not given a fair trial but are made to disappear, imprisoned and subjected to all kinds of torture and humiliation, both physical and mental. Like the army, the Egyptian intelligence forces can boast of holding an ever-expanding extra-military power, much larger than the one possessed by the security forces of Mubarak's regime, and of holding an economic and commercial oligopoly. This impressive and dense security system and the pervasive role of the army and of the intelligence organs is indispensable to feed the population's fear and hold power in el-Sisi's regime.

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<sup>35</sup> Sayigh, Y., *Missed Opportunity: The Politics of Police Reform in Egypt and Tunisia*, Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Centre, 17 March 2015, <https://carnegie-mec.org/2015/03/17/missed-opportunity-politics-of-police-reform-in-egypt-and-tunisia-pub-59391>, accessed 18 March 2022.

#### 2.4.4 Socio-economic development

In the field of domestic policy, el-Sisi's efforts were concentrated on the revival of the Egyptian economy. The Egyptian president issued a series of decrees concerning the taxation system, the currency market and the energy sector, with the aim to promote more investment-friendly market conditions. In November 2016, for instance, the government devalued the Egyptian lira by 48 percent to raise the level of foreign exchange reserves and to be able to receive a 12 billion dollars loan over three years from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)<sup>36</sup>, necessary to revitalise an economy that has suffered a severe outflow of tourists and foreign investors since the Arab Uprisings of 2011. In return, Egypt has pledged to implement a stabilisation process and to reform its regulatory framework, which should mean improving gross domestic product (GDP), moderating inflation, strengthening governance and transparency and integrating women and youth in the labour market.<sup>37</sup>

The Egyptian government initiated and developed numerous projects of national infrastructure upgrading. A first important project concerns the expansion of the Suez Canal, inaugurated on 6 August 2015, which will double the flow of ships passing through the canal, increase revenues and therefore enhance Egypt's role as an important international maritime route. The project is very successful among Egyptians as it is entirely financed with Egyptian capital without any foreign interference. According to the Suez Canal Authority (SCA), the new expansion should be ready in July 2023.<sup>38</sup> The New Valley Project, or Toshka Project, consists instead of a system of canals to transport water from Lake Nasser to the Egyptian Western Desert to allow for the development of industries and communities and to achieve self-sufficiency in resources such as wheat. Another project concerns the demolition of about 2.8 million unauthorised popular buildings to give space to the construction of the New Administrative Capital (NAC), the new capital city of the Egyptian country.<sup>39</sup> The project, launched in 2015, includes administrative buildings such as embassies, government agencies and the parliament, but also new cultural and touristic services and infrastructure, as well as 15

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<sup>36</sup> «Egypt devalues currency by 48% to meet IMF demands for \$12bn loan», *The Guardian*, 3 November 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/03/egypt-devalues-currency-meet-imf-demands-loan>, accessed 9 May 2022.

<sup>37</sup> International Monetary Fund, Press Release No. 17/511, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2017/12/20/pr17511-second-review-under-the-extended-fund-facility-with-egypt>, accessed 9 May 2022.

<sup>38</sup> «Suez Canal expansion project expected to finish in July 2023: SCA chairman», *Arab News*, 16 January 2022, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2005326/business-economy>, accessed 22 April 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Menshawy, M., «Why is Egypt building a new capital?», *Al Jazeera*, 5 July 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/7/5/why-is-egypt-building-a-new-capital>, accessed 22 April 2022.

square metres of green space per inhabitant. New Cairo is however going to serve only the wealthiest segments of the Egyptian population, while no concrete alternative and social housing projects are given to the poorest and underprivileged inhabitants. This allows the Egyptian authorities to gain the private sector's support and to maintain a certain level of stability and legitimacy, helping el-Sisi consolidate his power.

Egypt is heavily dependent on foreign investments, in particular from the United States, which, from 1978, has provided the Arab country with both military equipment (50 billion dollars) and economic assistance (30 billion dollars) and has helped it in the digitalisation of telecommunications, in modernising its infrastructure, in educating students and training professionals, and in enhancing its cultural heritage.<sup>40</sup> The country is then based on international borrowing and public debt, which accounts for 86 percent of its GDP. This external financing, added to monetary easings and the recent reforms concerning the macroeconomic and energetic sectors, enabled the Egyptian economy to react to the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2021. Despite this positive narrative of socioeconomic development, and although the Egyptian GDP has grown by 4.2 percent in 2017 and by 5.6 percent in 2019, 30 percent of the Egyptian population still remains below the poverty line, earning less than 45 dollars per month, and another 30 percent just above it. The recent austerity policies imposed by the IMF are indeed leading to severe inequalities as regards health, housing and education and to drastic cutbacks in basic necessities such as electricity and foodstuffs.<sup>41</sup>

#### 2.4.5 El-Sisi's re-elections in 2018

President el-Sisi was re-elected by a large majority of votes in the presidential elections of 26-28 March 2018, reaching more than 97 percent on a 41.5 percent turnout.<sup>42</sup> His election represented an evident symbol of *authoritarian upgrading*, i.e. of the ability of the Egyptian regime to reinvent itself and appease international criticism while still managing to keep an authoritarian regime in place. Indeed, going to the polls only offered a claim of democracy, but

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<sup>40</sup> Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, «U.S. Relations With Egypt», U.S. Department of State, 29 April 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-egypt/#:~:text=U.S.%20assistance%20to%20Egypt%20has,%2430%20billion%20in%20economic%20assistance,> accessed 28 April 2022.

<sup>41</sup> «Egypt Social Progress Indicators Reveal How Austerity Feeds Gross Inequalities», *Center for Economic and Social Rights*, 28 May 2019, <https://www.cesr.org/egypt-social-progress-indicators-reveal-how-austerity-feeds-gross-inequalities/>, accessed 9 May 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Michaelson, R., «Sisi wins landslide victory in Egypt election», *The Guardian*, 2 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/02/sisi-poised-to-declare-landslide-victory-in-egypt-election>, accessed 15 June 2022.

the election was strictly controlled by the state in order not to threaten the power of el-Sisi. Once again, all the main candidates halted their campaigns shortly before the elections: General Sami Anan, former Chief of Army Staff, and his deputy, Hicham Geneina, were arrested; Ahmed Shafiq, former prime minister, and Mohamed Anwar al-Sadat, grandson of the historic Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, withdrew after receiving threats and intimidation, as did Khaled Ali, lawyer and human rights activist. There was one sole political contender, namely Moussa Mostafa Moussa, who however declared admiration for el-Sisi and therefore represented a token figure to justify a sham election. Critical television journalists were made to disappear from the scene.<sup>43</sup>

In 2020, the outbreak of the pandemic has exacerbated the human rights situation in the Egyptian country, particularly as regards health and freedom. Detention conditions got drastically worse and several prisoners died of COVID-19 complications, also given the fact that they were rarely given adequate medical care. Prisoners were not given the possibility to meet their families and their lawyers and were hence deprived of care, support and justice. Within this unhealthy framework, the Egyptian authorities started to strategically instrumentalise the emergency with a harsh repression of those who criticised the government's way of dealing with the pandemic, charging them of "spreading false news."

The Egyptian government has not announced any specific state of emergency to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19. This was because a state of emergency was already in force: it was imposed by President el-Sisi on 10 April 2017 in response to the suicide bombings at two Egyptian churches in Tanta and Alexandria claimed by the extremist Islamic State (ISIS), and then extended every three months until el-Sisi suspended it on 25 October 2021.<sup>44</sup> This continuous re-imposition of states of emergency, beginning with the drafting of Emergency Law No. 162/1958, has now led to the normalisation of a regime that has forced the Egyptian people into a life based on restrictions, where several rights are suspended and police and military powers are extended. Law 162/1958 was theoretically drafted to expand the executive's power during situations of emergency, but concretely had the purpose of giving the Egyptian president the authority to repress any kind of opposition.

In April 2022, an amendment to the 2014 Constitution was largely approved: 88.8 percent of the votes extended President el-Sisi's second term from four to six years and

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<sup>43</sup> Curzi, P., «Egitto, attivisti in manette e sindacati smantellati: la stretta di Al Sisi dopo la morte di Giulio Regeni», *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 30 June 2019, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/06/30/egitto-attivisti-in-manette-e-sindacati-smantellati-la-stretta-di-al-sisi-dopo-la-morte-di-giulio-regeni/5290452/>, accessed 30 May 2022.

<sup>44</sup> «Egypt: Horrific Palm Sunday Bombings», *Human Rights Watch*, 12 April 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/12/egypt-horrific-palm-sunday-bombings>, accessed 30 March 2022.

eliminated the limit of two consecutive terms, allowing him to seek one more term in 2024 and to eventually stay in power until 2030. According to Human Rights Watch, “the referendum took place in such an unfree and unfair environment that its results can have no pretence to legitimacy.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> «Egypt president could rule until 2030 as constitutional changes backed», *BBC News*, 24 April 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48035512>, accessed 12 April 2022.



## Chapter 3

### The relations between Italy and Egypt

#### 3.1 The Mediterranean Sea

The Mediterranean Sea has been at the centre of the history of the world for centuries and keeps holding a considerable geopolitical importance even nowadays. As it washes the coasts of three big continents, namely southern Europe, northern Africa, and the western edge of Asia, it has always represented a geostrategic point in the field of international relations. Its waters have been known and navigated since ancient times and its coasts have seen the rise and fall of powerful empires that have always nourished the ambition to dominate it. The region has indeed become the cradle of the first great civilisations, in particular the Greco-Roman one, and the homeland of the major monotheistic religions, namely Judaism, Islamism and Christianity. Some civilisations even owed their success to the control of this strategic area, as for instance the Roman Empire: its hegemony, which lasted centuries, settled on the rule of the Mediterranean Sea routes and on the domination of the surrounding territories. *Mare Nostrum* was the name the Romans assigned it, a declaration of the prosperity they had acquired thanks to the huge commercial flow that ran through its waters. The Mediterranean Sea therefore represents an essential part of the European and Western identity and is an intertwining of innumerable cultural, economic, and political exchanges deeply consolidated throughout the centuries by its populations, which enabled them to grow in prosperity and mutually enrich each other. But it was only with the Early Modern Age, the period of the expeditions, the discoveries, and the technological development of navigations, that the Mediterranean Sea ceased to be perceived as a barrier and became to be seen as a connection that provided new horizons and celebrated the fruitful encounter between North and South and between East and West.

According to the 2021 Annual Report *Italian Maritime Economy* published by SRM - *Studi e Ricerche per il Mezzogiorno*<sup>46</sup>, maritime transport represents the main vehicle for the development of international trade: 90 percent of goods travel by sea and maritime logistics is worth around 12 percent of global gross domestic product. The Mediterranean Sea in particular

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<sup>46</sup> Studi e Ricerche per il Mezzogiorno is the research centre attached to the Intesa SanPaolo Group.

represents one of the most important maritime routes of the international and global arena. It encompasses nearly a third of world trade, with tens of millions of containers loaded every day with all kinds of goods and big hub ports on which many traffic lines converge, or from which they depart. According to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Mediterranean Sea can count on approximately 450 ports and terminals – ports that are located in a strategic central position, providing a logistic platform for the East-West trade route and a connection between the Atlantic and Indian oceans – and on 20 percent of the global maritime traffic.<sup>47</sup>

For about ten years now, the Mediterranean has been discovered to be the guardian of precious oil and gas fields, in particular in the eastern region, from the Ionian and Aegean seas in Greece to the waters off the coast of Cyprus, Turkey, Israel, Lebanon, and Egypt. This has made the area a strategic pillar for the supply of these resources at the regional level and represents a great geopolitical opportunity for those who control these fields. Above all, natural gas is changing the geopolitical situation of the sea: its many economic and environmental benefits make it the third natural resource in world energy consumption, giving it a huge potential and a great prospect of growth. Controlling the energy production and distribution chains of this region has therefore become an ambition for countries and companies all over the world. In recent years, several studies have led to the discovery of some huge gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean region. States with access to these hydrocarbons reserves (Cyprus, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian territories) have managed to increase their productive potential, which enabled them to both cover their domestic demand and allocate the remaining reserves to foreign trade, while the countries concerned with their exploitation and distribution (Italy, Cyprus and Greece) have been able to make profit by entering in a rich distribution value chain. In this regard, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority projected and started developing the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline (EastMed), a 1,900-kilometer-long natural gas pipeline that will connect the gas reserves of the Levant Sea to Greece, from where they will reach Italy and south-eastern Europe. The pipeline will transport 10 billion cubic metres of natural gas per year, which corresponds to 10 percent of European needs, and is expected to go into operation in 2025.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, «La strategia italiana nel Mediterraneo. Stabilizzare le crisi e costruire un'agenda positiva per la regione», <https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2017/12/rapporto-med-maeci-ita.pdf>, accessed 17 January 2022.

<sup>48</sup> NS Energy, Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline Project», <https://www.nsenegybusiness.com/projects/eastern-mediterranean-pipeline-project/>, accessed 17 January 2022.



From a political point of view, the Mediterranean has been defined as a ‘crossroads’ of continents, a fundamental springboard for cooperation and connectivity not only between the states bathed by its waters but also between the entire European, African, and Asian continents. Some scholars have indeed coined the term *Enlarged Mediterranean* to describe an area that has now taken over a large slice of hinterland and that has even become a global connection platform. It is therefore clear that those who aspire to a leading role in the world aspire to be protagonists in the Mediterranean framework too. But it is also evident that the full potential of the region can only be harnessed if Mediterranean countries fully cooperate to develop efficient and high-quality infrastructure to take full advantage of the precious resources of their territories. One of the first attempts to implement political cooperation between the Mediterranean states was the Barcelona Process, or Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Euromed), an intergovernmental institution undertaken in 1995 and reinforced in 2008 with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). The partnership seeks to create a peaceful, stable and prosper common area and to enhance cooperation and dialogue between member states. It comprises the 27 European Union member states and 15 southern Mediterranean countries, namely Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Syria (suspended on December 1, 2011), Tunisia and Turkey, and has Libya as an observer.

At the same time, unfortunately, the dynamics of the Mediterranean Basin have always been very fragmented. Indeed, this area does not solely represent a meeting ground for its different peoples and cultures but is also an unstable region pervaded by economic and political crises, ideological conflicts, and security and humanitarian challenges. According to some reports, 15.7 percent of global conflicts in 2014 took place in the MENA region.<sup>49</sup> It is not just about inter-state conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli one, but also about intra-state wars or even non-state wars, conflicts between or among non-state entities such as terrorist groups.<sup>50</sup> One need only think of the Libyan political-military instability and of the Syrian civil war, both beginning with the Arab uprisings of 2011, of the war in Afghanistan, of the Iraqi conflict, and of the huge migration crisis all these clashes provoked; just think also of the spread of Da’esh in Iraq and Syria and of the dangers posed by foreign terrorist fighters. In such a highly unstable

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<sup>49</sup> Dentice, G., Talbot, V., «A geopolitical sea: the new scramble for the Mediterranean», *Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale*, 17 July 2020, [https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/isp\\_i\\_dossier\\_a\\_geopolitical\\_sea\\_july\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/isp_i_dossier_a_geopolitical_sea_july_2020.pdf), accessed 12 January 2022.

<sup>50</sup> As they are defined by the Correlates of War (COW) project, an academic study started in 1963 at the University of Michigan by political scientist J. David Singer.

theatre, a precious resource such as natural gas may become a further cause of friction between states. Therefore, multilateral action to ensure security in this area has become one of the main issues in the agenda of many Mediterranean countries.

Geographically speaking, the Mediterranean Sea represents an almost completely enclosed basin: by Western and Southern Europe and Anatolia on the north, by North Africa on the south, and by the Levant on the east. It is therefore accessible only through key strategic points: straits. The Gibraltar Strait provides the connection to the Atlantic Ocean, the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles an access to the Black Sea, while the Suez Canal a direct door to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean and the fastest route to Asia. If we keep in mind that about 80 percent of global trade takes place by sea, having control of these passages means having control of the flow of goods over a very vast area, and this has thereby always represented another source of interest – but also another source of conflict – throughout history.

### **3.2 The role of Egypt in the Mediterranean**

Within the bipolar framework of cooperation and conflict that characterises the Mediterranean area, Egypt possesses an important economic and commercial centrality.

#### **3.2.1 The Suez Canal**

The first big advantage that Egypt can boast of is the control of the Suez Canal through the state-owned Suez Canal Authority (SCA). The Suez Canal is a navigable artificial waterway located west of the Sinai Peninsula, between Port Said on the Mediterranean Sea and Suez (al-Suways) on the Red Sea. This represents a unique geographic location since it allows navigation from Asia to Europe without the need to circumnavigate Africa on the Cape of Good Hope route. The canal is therefore considered one of the main *chokepoints* of the Middle East, a strategic hub for world maritime traffic that provides an essential connection between Asia, Europe, and the East Coast of the United States.

The history of the Suez Canal is a history marked by competition, crises and wars, and since its inauguration it has always been hotly contended for its strategic role. It is indeed one of the main trade routes in the world, especially as regards energy, raw materials, consumer goods and components, guaranteeing around 12 percent of world merchant traffic and carrying \$1 trillion worth of cargoes per year. Moreover, it is a key regional hub for shipping

hydrocarbons: about 7-10 percent of the world's oil and about 8 percent of liquefied natural gas flow through its waters annually.<sup>51</sup>

The Suez Canal was inaugurated and financed by the French and Egyptian governments in 1869. When the British military occupied Egypt in 1882, it was de facto acquired by Great Britain itself. With the 1888 Constantinople Convention, the British declared it a neutral zone under their protection and allowed free transit to all ships both in times of peace and war. After the Second World War, the canal started becoming more and more central in geopolitical clashes. Tensions started to emerge with the settlement of a new Arab-nationalist government in 1952, when the Egyptian army officers overthrew the monarchy of King Faruq. Four years later, in July 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser announced its nationalisation, and the Egyptian government started exercising complete control on the waterway through the SCA. This provoked further friction between Egypt and Israel, and after the Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula in October 1956, supported by France and Great Britain, the canal remained closed for one year. It was then involved in the numerous wars between Israel and the Arab countries, and after the Six-Day War in June 1967 it remained blocked for another eight years. It was only after the Yom Kippur War in October 1973 that Egypt was able to regain full control of the waterway.

During the 2000s, the canal has maintained its strategic centrality in world trade and transport, so much that the Egyptian government, ruled by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, announced a massive investment to modernise and expand it in 2015. The project of a New Suez Canal involved the creation of a second parallel canal which allowed ships to simultaneously transit in both directions, hence reducing transit times and increasing the number and size of transit units. As stated by the Suez Canal Authority, this major work aimed at increasing the daily average of transiting vessels from 49 to 97 ships and the canal revenues from 5.3 billion dollars to 13.226 billion dollars by the year 2023, a 259 percent increase that might boost the hard currency earnings for the Egyptian national income, enhance the Egyptian national economy, and turn Egypt into an international logistics centre. Official estimates by the same SCA report the evolution of the ship traffic through the years, highlighting significant increases after the inauguration of the new canal in August 2015. Indeed, nearly 90,000 vessels carrying more than 5 billion tonnes of cargo transited the Suez Canal in 2015-2019 – compared to the 87,000 vessels carrying 4,5 billion tonnes in 2010-2014.

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<sup>51</sup> Bergantino, A.S., «The Suez Canal: Perspectives After the Ever Given Accident». *Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale*, 27 October 2021, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/suez-canal-perspectives-after-ever-given-accident-32127>, accessed 14 January 2022.

The huge and constant naval traffic that characterises the Suez Canal ensures the Egyptian state considerable economic revenues deriving from ship tolls. These revenues represent a considerable part of Egypt’s national income and one of Egypt’s most important sources of hard currency. SCA Chairman Osama Rabie declared that revenues from the Suez Canal have risen since the inauguration of the second waterway: from about 25 billion dollars in 2010-2015 they reached more than 27 billion dollars in 2015-2020.

#### NO & Net Ton Evolution (2010-2019)

Year	Number of vessels		Net ton (1000)	
	Total	Daily avg.	Total	Daily avg.
2010	17,993	49.3	846,389	2,318.9
2011	17,799	48.8	928,880	2,544.9
2012	17,224	47.2	928,472	2,543.8
2013	16,596	45.5	915,468	2,508.1
2014	17,148	47.0	962,747	2,637.7
2015	17,483	47.9	998,652	2,736.0
2016	16,883	46.0	974,185	2,661.7
2017	17,550	48.1	1,041,576	2,853.6
2018	18,174	49.8	1,139,630	3,122.3
2019	18,880	51.7	1,207,087	3,307.1

Source:

<https://www.suezcanal.gov.eg/English/Downloads/DownloadsDocLibrary/Navigation%20Reports/Annual%20Reports%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B/2019.pdf>.

From the fiscal year<sup>52</sup> 2019/2020, Egypt’s revenue growth has suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, which brought with it severe economic consequences in every country of the world and severely affected global shipping and trade chains. Nevertheless, as evidence of the great importance it holds as one of the main routes of international trade, the Suez Canal showed remarkable resilience even in 2020: it not only exceeded one billion tonnes of cargo and 18,000 transiting vessels, but also increased its revenues to 5.72 billion dollars in 2019/2020 and even to 5.84 billion dollars in 2020/2021 – the highest revenues in its history.

<sup>52</sup> Fiscal year in Egypt runs from 1 July to 30 June.

### Suez Canal Revenues: Annual (2010-2021)

Year	Revenues (USD BLN)
2010/2011	5.22
2011/2012	5.13
2012/2013	5.11
2013/2014	5.41
2014/2015	5.18
2015/2016	5.01
2016/2017	5.28
2017/2018	5.7
2018/2019	5.8
2019/2020	5.72
2020/2021	5.84

Source: [www.ceicdata.com](http://www.ceicdata.com), [www.egyptindependent.com](http://www.egyptindependent.com) – Suez Canal Authority

The central role the Suez Canal detains in the global trade scenario became fully evident on 23 March 2021, when *Ever Given*, a huge container ship, ran aground in the canal itself. The obstruction of the waterway prevented the passage of any ship for six long days; about 450 vessels remained blocked waiting to transit the canal, while others decided to reroute to the Cape of Good Hope, dramatically extending their route and increasing shipping costs. As SCA Chairman pointed out, the blockage caused Egypt a loss of 14-15 million dollars in revenue per day. Moreover, according to some estimates of Lloyd's List, an international newspaper specialised in shipping and maritime intelligence, the accident created an economic loss of at least 9.6 billion dollars each day – or 6.7 million dollars a minute.<sup>53</sup> In order to further increase the capacity of the canal and make it more resilient to accidents such as the *Ever Given* one, the Egyptian government announced new works to widen the Suez Canal and started them in May 2021. The project involves the enlargement of the southern entrance by 40 metres towards the eastern shore of the Sinai, the excavation of the seabed from 20 to 22 metres, and the lengthening of the second canal by about 10 kilometres.

<sup>53</sup> Russon, M.A., «The cost of the Suez Canal blockage», *BBC News*, 29 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-56559073>, accessed 14 January 2022.

### 3.2.2 Natural gas fields

Egypt's second workhorse within the Mediterranean framework is represented by the huge gas fields that have been discovered in its waters. Even if the exploration of the Egyptian territorial waters only began in the sixties of the twentieth century and many areas of the Mediterranean Sea still remain unexplored, the Egyptian territory has recently become famous for hosting numerous and rich hydrocarbon deposits. Exploration activities have been intensifying mainly thanks to the advent of new technologies in the field of natural gas exploration but were also pushed by geopolitical and commercial factors such as the high or low availability of resources in international markets.

In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, the Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS) mandated its operators to search for energy resources and natural gas activities around the Nile delta. Three years later, in August 2015, one of the 15 exploration blocks led to the discovery of a big offshore natural gas field in the Shorouk Block, approximately 190 kilometres away from Port Said, Egypt, and therefore within the Egyptian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ): the Zohr gas field. Zohr is touted to be the largest-ever natural gas field of the entire Mediterranean Basin: it expands over an area of about 100 square kilometres and is expected to contain 850 billion cubic metres of potential resources. The size of this plant had a major impact on Egypt itself, not only managing to satisfy all the country's natural gas requirements for decades, but also potentially turning it into an important regional energy hub. Since 2018, when the field started production, it has allowed Egypt to reach self-sufficiency of natural gas after turbulent years and has transformed it from a country heavily dependent on gas imports to a gas-exporting country, as reported by Tarek El Mola, Egyptian Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources.<sup>54</sup>

Worthy of mention is also the discovery of the Nooros gas field within the Great Nooros Area, in the Abu Madi West licence in the conventional waters of the Nile Delta. Discovered in July 2015, the field is expected to contain around 120 billion cubic metres of potential resources.

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<sup>54</sup> «Egypt achieved self-sufficiency in natural gas in 3 years, Petroleum Minister says», *Arab News*, 15 November 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1968316/business-economy>, accessed 17 January 2022.

### 3.2.3 EastMed

The Egyptian government has tried to define its own foreign policy in order to assert its position and become competitive within the Arab framework. These strategic prospects are projected in a particular scenario called ‘EastMed.’ The project of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF)<sup>55</sup>, also known as EastMed, was initially conceived by the Egyptian government in 2018 with the aim to create an international organisation that would boost economic cooperation in the natural gas sector of the East Mediterranean region, including both natural gas producing, consuming and transit countries. The initiative set the base for a structured policy dialogue between Energy Ministers and representatives of several countries, namely Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Palestine, and Egypt itself. It is politically and financially supported by the European Commission and the World Bank, and technically supported by the Gas Industry Advisory Committee (GIAC), a dialogue platform which promotes research and development in the gas industry and is made up by the major companies of the seven member states, for instance the Italian Eni, Saipem and Snam. The initiative became concrete on 22 September 2020, when the international organisation was formally created. Subsequently, France joined the organisation too, while the European Union and the United States started acting as permanent observers. Both the signing ceremony and the headquarters of the intergovernmental forum have been located in Cairo, Egypt, which made the country the regional major hub for natural gas producers and exporters.

This context of regional cooperation has seen the rise of another significant natural gas project, which is not only enhancing the role of the East Mediterranean regions but also raising curiosity and interest at the international level. It is about the EastMed pipeline, a natural gas pipeline currently under development which aims at directly connecting the eastern Mediterranean – the Levantine Basin, i.e., the waters between Israel and Cyprus – to Greece; from there, other pipelines will finally reach Italy (the Poseidon pipeline) and other European regions. With 1,375 kilometres offshore and 480 kilometres onshore, it would represent the longest pipeline ever developed and would transport 10 billion cubic metres per year (bcm/y) – planned to be increased to 20 bcm/y. Therefore, it would clearly be a great opportunity for the eastern Mediterranean countries to become important gas hubs and a major chance for European states to improve their energy security and overcome the uncertainties of energy transition. The project’s agreement was signed in Athens by Cyprus, Greece and Israel on 2 January 2020,

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<sup>55</sup> East Mediterranean Gas Forum. EMGF Statute Signing - September 22nd, 2020, [https://emgf.org/gva\\_event/emgf-statute-signing-september-22nd-2020/](https://emgf.org/gva_event/emgf-statute-signing-september-22nd-2020/), accessed 12 January 2022.

while works are expected to be completed in 2025-2027. These are managed by IGI Poseidon S.A., a joint venture between the two gas utilities Public Gas Corporation of Greece A.E. (Greek), also known as DEPA, and Edison S.p.A. (Italian).

### **3.3 The role of Italy in the Mediterranean**

#### **3.3.1 Trade routes**

The role the Mediterranean plays for Italy seems, at first glance, banal: geographically speaking, this peninsula and its islands are all bathed by its waters and are perfectly located at its centre. This means that the two fundamental lines of the Mediterranean trade – which are also two of the most important routes at the international level – intersect in Italian waters: the east-west line, which connects the eastern and the western Mediterranean, and the south-north line, which unites the African continent to the European one; dozens of minor routes then converge towards their centre, making Italy a strategic hub of international trade. The European Union has acknowledged the great value of these axes and has included them in the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), a policy based on Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013, which supports the development of a set of infrastructures – rails, roads, rivers, urban nodes, ports, freight villages and airports – to promote the movement of goods and people and strengthen the growth and competitiveness of the European Union’s market. The construction of an efficient communications network, the development of the economies of scale of naval gigantism, and the advent of the container revolution have pushed international markets towards greater connectivity and have generated increasingly stronger global value chains. Therefore, the strategic relevance of an efficient network of logistic infrastructure cannot be underestimated.

According to the latest updated data, in 2020 the value of the Italian sea trade amounted to 206.3 billion euros, 99.8 billion euros in imports and 106.5 billion euros in exports, which correspond to 33 percent of the country’s total trade.<sup>56</sup> This was made possible by the articulated port system it is fitted with, towards which most of the goods and resources coming from the Mediterranean region and directed to the European continents head. Of considerable importance are not only the three big ports of Trieste, Genoa, and Livorno, but also southern Italian ones,

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<sup>56</sup> Ufficio Stampa Intesa Sanpaolo, «Il nuovo Rapporto 2021 ‘Italian Maritime Economy’ di SRM presentato oggi in diretta da Napoli», <https://www.sr-m.it/media/files/CS-STAMPA-MARITIME-2021.pdf>, accessed 12 January 2022.



especially with regard to the energy sector; indeed, they account for 47 percent of the country's seaborne oil supplies and exports and are terminals of important pipelines from North Africa and Asia.

This central strategic position gives Italy the opportunity to establish itself as one of the most prominent actors of the region and to make its voice heard in many strategic areas.

### 3.3.2 The Mediterranean Dialogues and EastMed

First of all, Italy's strategic position allows it to act as a bridge between the European continent and the Middle East and North Africa. This makes it possible to create a sense of dialogue and cooperation in facing the multiple challenges that arise in the Mediterranean region itself.

Every year since 2015, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and ISPI (the Italian Institute for International Policy Studies) promote the Rome MED - Mediterranean Dialogues, a global forum for interchange on the geopolitics of the Mediterranean Basin. Held in Rome, MED is based on four pillars: shared prosperity, shared security, migration, and civil society and culture. Leaders, entrepreneurs, academics, representatives of important international organisations and several other experts take part to the dialogues, which focus on the present-day challenges – such as regional crises, geopolitical competitions, the terrorist threat, and the management of migration flows – and opportunities – such as economic investments, technological innovations, and new energy scenarios<sup>57</sup> – of the Mediterranean and Middle East area. During the last edition of the Dialogues, held from 2 to 4 December 2021, particular attention was paid to the COVID-19 pandemic and the current political and economic transition, the issue of infrastructure and the main legislative and financial interventions to implement them and to foster economic growth and integration.

Italy is also part of the EastMed Forum's framework with respect to both the search for dialogue and cooperation within the Mediterranean context and the construction of the new EastMed gas pipeline. Participation in these projects could represent a strong strategic interest for Italy itself, enhancing the country's industrial role in the Mediterranean area and making it a potential gas gateway to European markets. This emerged at the conference *Energies in the Mediterranean: the contribution of the private sector to regional development (Energie nel Mediterraneo: il contributo del settore privato allo sviluppo regionale)*, held on 28 November

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<sup>57</sup> <https://med.ispionline.it/>.

2019 and organised by Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).<sup>58</sup> In addition to IAI President Ferdinando Nelli Feroci and Director General for Globalisation and Global Issues at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Luca Sabbatucci, several representatives of the main Italian companies engaged in the Mediterranean region took part in the debate: European and Euro-Mediterranean Affairs Director at Enel Simone Mori, International Relations Director at Eni Lapo Pistelli, External Relations Manager at TAP Davide Sempio, and Head of External Relations and Sustainability at Terna Luca Torchia. On that occasion, Pistelli claimed that “the challenge for Italian companies is to invest above all in the Eastern Mediterranean,” and from the background paper of the conference it emerged that “Italy is one of the leading players in the region. Major players such as Eni, Enel, Snam, Terna and Edison [...] represent one of the main drivers of the energy transition in the Mediterranean quadrant.” “Eni is a leading player in the gas sector,” “Snam is main shareholder within the TAP consortium for the construction of the gas pipeline that will connect with the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP), thus helping transfer gas from Azerbaijan to Italy,” “Edison is involved in the EastMed pipeline project,” “Terna plays a leading role in electricity connection, involved in the construction of two submarine interconnections,” while “Enel plays a leading role in the context of renewable energy.”

It is therefore clear that the central geographical position of the Italian peninsula makes it a perfect intermodal hub for connection with the entire Mediterranean Basin. Besides being a great economic and commercial advantage, this could potentially serve as a geopolitical instrument in the hands of Italian diplomacy to assert its views on many important tables. However, Italy has not been able to exploit this advantage yet. Indeed, it is often a country with a very weak sense of foreign policy, a country which has overlooked the ambition of becoming a pivotal actor in the Mediterranean for years. This has ended up creating an “empty space” in the Mediterranean context and gradually attracting the strategic decisions of economic great powers such as the United States, Russia, and China.

### **3.4 The relations between Italy and Egypt**

After having analysed the role that Italy and Egypt play in the Mediterranean context, the chapter now focuses on the relationship that these two states have cultivated – and are still

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<sup>58</sup> «Energie nel Mediterraneo: il contributo del settore privato allo sviluppo regionale». *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, 28 November 2019, <https://www.iai.it/it/eventi/energie-nel-mediterraneo-il-contributo-del-settore-privato-allo-sviluppo-regionale>, accessed 21 January 2022.

cultivating – over the last years, paying particular attention to the trends and evolutions from the period before the case of Giulio Regeni to the period after it.

### 3.4.1 Diplomatic relations

The Embassy of Italy in Cairo represents Italy and its Head of State in the Arab Republic of Egypt. Based in the historic neighbourhood of Garden City in Cairo, it was built in 1929 and is among the most ancient diplomatic missions in Egyptian territory. Italy also possesses a consular district, which includes the Consulate of Italy in Cairo, the Consulate General of Italy in Alessandria, the Honorary Consulate of Sharm El Sheikh and the Vice Consulates of Hurghada and Luxor; these work to protect the interests of Italian citizens resident in the Arab country. On its part, Egypt has an Embassy in Rome and a Consulate in Milan.

The Italian state has maintained positive bilateral relations with Egypt since the end of the Second World War: on 10 September 1946, the two countries signed a peace agreement in Paris, putting an end to the hostilities that emerged with the Italian invasion of Egypt in 1940. With the ratification of the peace agreement on 12 May 1947, Italy guaranteed the payment of war repairs to the Arab country while Egypt ensured the release of Italian citizens' assets. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were officially restored on 30 June 1947, when the first Italian ambassador took office in Cairo.

Bilateral relations have continued apace to the present day. Nonetheless, on 3 February 2016, namely in the immediate aftermath of the tragic discovery of a corpse in a ditch on the outskirts of Cairo, the then Italian Minister of Economic Development Federica Guidi suspended her ongoing visit to the Egyptian capital. The visit included a delegation of 60 companies and representatives of SACE (an Italian company specialised in insurance and financial services for businesses), SIMEST (specialised in the development and promotion of Italian companies abroad) and Confindustria (the leading association representing manufacturing and service companies in Italy). The programme included meetings with the Egyptian President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi, Prime Minister Sherif Ismail, the Suez Canal Authority, and several other economic ministers to sign important economic agreements and intensify the interchange between the two Mediterranean countries. As soon as the corpse turned out to be that of Giulio Regeni, the then Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni agreed with Prime Minister Matteo Renzi to call the delegation back to Italy and ask the Egyptian state for full cooperation in the investigation. Diplomatic relations between Italy and Egypt were however seriously put

into question on 7-8 April 2016, when the two countries' authorities met in their first summit on Giulio Regeni's case. The meeting turned out to be a failure, as the Egyptian government members did not adopt a collaborative attitude. The several attempts by the Egyptian government to conceal and disguise any investigation prompted the Italian Foreign Ministry to halt collaboration with the African country and withdraw the Italian ambassador to Cairo Maurizio Massari for consultations on 8 April 2016. Gentiloni found it necessary to intervene with "an urgent evaluation of the most appropriate initiatives to ascertain the truth about the barbaric murder of Giulio Regeni."<sup>59</sup> This proved however very difficult: as months passed, the Egyptian authorities were not giving any signs of cooperation; on the contrary, they answered by not delivering documents and by hiding minutes, surveillance footage and cell phone towers' data. Moreover, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry stressed that Egypt was not involved in the case at all.

The recall of the Italian ambassador could have represented a diplomatic gesture with a strong political and symbolic value: it could have given a clear signal that Italy would have done whatever was necessary to obtain truth and justice. This, unfortunately, did not happen. On 11 May 2017, instead of putting additional pressure to the Egyptian authorities, the Gentiloni Government and the then Italian Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano decided to normalise relations with the Arab country and to appoint Giampaolo Cantini, former Director General for Development Cooperation at the Italian Foreign Ministry, as the new Italian ambassador to Cairo. According to Gentiloni and Alfano, this would allow the government to "strengthen its political and moral commitment to the search for the truth about Giulio's disappearance. Cantini has received precise instructions and is to follow the investigation of the case as a priority."<sup>60</sup> By returning the Italian ambassador back to Egypt, the only action of diplomatic enmity that Italy undertook to exert pressure on the African state was literally nullified, since it neither forced the Egyptian authorities to collaborate nor rippled the waters of the investigations. Cantini's settlement on 14 September 2017 provoked a great deal of criticism in an entire country, from the political scene to the public opinion, from the world of journalism to the civil society. It represented an offence in the eyes of many people, which saw the Italian government abandoning the last hope of justice, weakening the security of all researchers in Egyptian soil and disrespecting the life of Giulio Regeni and the commitment of everybody

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<sup>59</sup> Schianchi, F., «Caso Regeni, il governo richiama l'ambasciatore e pensa alle prossime mosse», *La Stampa*, 9 April 2016, <https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/2016/04/09/news/caso-regeni-il-governo-richiama-l-ambasciatore-e-pensa-alle-prossime-mosse-1.36592811>, accessed 14 December 2021.

<sup>60</sup> «Regeni, Alfano: "L'Egitto è partner ineludibile dell'Italia"», *La Repubblica*, 4 September 2017, [https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2017/09/04/news/alfano\\_egitto\\_regeni-174605862/](https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2017/09/04/news/alfano_egitto_regeni-174605862/), accessed 4 January 2022.

who has worked, and is still working, to find the truth. Claudio Regeni and Paola Deffendi defined the decision as an art-made surrender:

The fact that we decided to send the Italian ambassador back to Cairo from our point of view was a sign of complete defeat and renunciation of the demand for truth and justice, as it was then effectively interpreted by the Egyptians. In fact, from that moment on, they started to cooperate less and less, to the point of total silence.<sup>61</sup>

Only when we have the truth about why and whoever killed Giulio, only when we are given, alive, his torturers and all their accomplices, only then can the ambassador return to Cairo without stepping on our dignity.<sup>62</sup>

Many saw the reappointment of the ambassador as a sign of the inability of the Italian government to impose itself in the international diplomatic arena, even if its increasing role in the Mediterranean and Egyptian economies could be used as a geopolitical instrument to assert its views on many tables. Others saw it as an unwillingness to do so, a sign that Italy preferred preserving its political, economic and commercial interests rather than fighting for democratic values and for the safeguard of human rights. Opinions aside, the arrival of Cantini to the Embassy in Cairo clearly showed that the Italian interests in Egypt were too relevant to be buried and that the Italian government was unwilling to definitively cut ties with the Arab country. Egypt is “an unavoidable partner” of Italy, with whom it is “impossible not to have high-level political and diplomatic relations,” said Alfano.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, at the time of Giulio Regeni’s murder, the economic and commercial opportunities in Egypt were very promising, and problematic issues such as the war on Islamic terrorism, the stability of Libya and the management of migration flows depended on a stable and prosper diplomatic relationship with the North African country.

Critics about the passive and apathetic behaviour of Italian politics kept increasing. The role of the then Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi raised not a few questions in this regard. It is well known that Renzi developed a strong relationship with the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, considering it as one of the major achievements of his foreign policy. In August

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<sup>61</sup> Deffendi, P., Regeni, C., Ballerini, A. (2020), *Giulio fa cose*, Milano: Feltrinelli, p. 76.

<sup>62</sup> «Regeni: da Egitto nuovi atti a pm Roma. Ambasciatore torna al Cairo ed è polemica. Famiglia indignata: “Resa incondizionata”», *La Repubblica*, 14 August 2017, [https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2017/08/14/news/regeni\\_da\\_egitto\\_nuovi\\_atti\\_a\\_pm\\_roma\\_passo\\_avanti\\_-\\_173051787/](https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2017/08/14/news/regeni_da_egitto_nuovi_atti_a_pm_roma_passo_avanti_-_173051787/), accessed 14 December 2022.

<sup>63</sup> Francavilla, C., «Italy Returns Ambassador to Egypt Despite Unresolved Regeni Case», *Human Rights Watch*, 16 June 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/13/italy-returns-ambassador-egypt-despite-unresolved-regeni-case>, accessed 14 December 2022.

2014, soon after el-Sisi's election, Renzi was the first Western representative to meet the Egyptian President in Cairo, and in November 2014 the Egyptian president made his first European visit in Rome. The two politicians brought on the agenda international policy issues regarding the security and stability of Palestine, Libya and the Mediterranean area and openly declared their willingness to cooperate and find common solutions. In an interview for the Qatari news channel *Al Jazeera* in July 2015, Renzi defined the Egyptian president as "a great leader" and claimed that "Egypt will be saved only with the leadership of el-Sisi." He declared himself even as "proud" of his friendship with him.<sup>64</sup> The Italian politician took part to the Egypt Economic Development Conference (EEDC)<sup>65</sup> held in Sharm El-Sheikh in March 2015 and was the only European premier who joined the meeting, surrounded by figures such as the US Secretary of State John Kerry, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov and the Saudi Arabian, United Arab Emirates' and Turkish counterparts. On that occasion, the Italian politician openly declared his strong support for the Egyptian Head of State and for the Arab country:

We support his vision, his fight against corruption, and his work for stability. [...] Egypt faces the growing threats of terrorism, remaining attached to the respect for freedom. Egypt's stability is our stability. We appreciate the leadership and the wisdom of el-Sisi, especially as regards Libya.

Finally, he expressed his commitment to strengthen ties with Egypt, highlighting the importance this may represent from an economic point of view:

Our friendship has become our partnership even for the economy. Italy plays an important role for Egypt in the fields of energy, transports, petrochemicals, in the banking system. Now it is time to increase our presence both in quantitative and in qualitative terms.<sup>66</sup>

While the tragic event uncovered the human rights' violations el-Sisi's regime was silently committing, made of repressions, kidnappings, tortures and killings, Renzi's support for the Egyptian president remained unchanged. With the exception of a few statements, in

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<sup>64</sup> Serra, B., «Q&AA with Italian PM: 'I think Sisi is a great leader'», *Al Jazeera*, 12 July 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/7/12/qa-with-italian-pm-i-think-sisi-is-a-great-leader>, accessed 4 January 2022.

<sup>65</sup> The Egypt Economic Development Conference is an economic forum to which more than one thousand entrepreneurs, politicians and diplomats took part to explore the investment opportunities in the Arab country.

<sup>66</sup> «Forum economico Sharm el-Sheikh, Renzi: "Italia e Egitto devono essere un ponte"», *La Repubblica*, 13 March 2015, [https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2015/03/13/news/renzi\\_egitto-109462988/](https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2015/03/13/news/renzi_egitto-109462988/), accessed 4 January 2022.

which he expressed a feeble will to discover the truth, the Italian politician did not even try to adequately raise his voice on the matter. On the contrary, he even openly took the side of the Egyptian government on several occasions. In February 2016, for instance, during the Assembly of the Italian Democratic Party (PD), Renzi expressed his gratitude for Egypt's "full cooperation" on the investigations.<sup>67</sup> On November 2020, in the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on Giulio Regeni's death<sup>68</sup>, not only did he claim that "Egyptian non-cooperation is a false," but he also praised el-Sisi's mutual assistance, defining it as "definitely above the standards" of an authoritarian regime. Moreover, on that occasion, he even expressed his regret of not having known of the death of the young Italian researcher before January 31: "We put in place everything we could. If we had known before, we could have acted sooner." However, all the steps taken with the Egyptian authorities have been well documented by the then Italian ambassador Massari, and the documents show how the security services have been informed of the fact since the first hours after Regeni's disappearance on 25 January 2016.

On 18 July 2018, then Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Matteo Salvini travelled to Egypt for a meeting with President el-Sisi. A "long and cordial" meeting, which was attended also by the Egyptian Interior Minister Mahmoud Tawfiq, the head of the General Intelligence Service Abbas Kamel, and Ambassador Giuseppe Cantini. On that occasion, the Italian politician declared his willingness to continue and intensify cooperation with Egypt in the economic field, in the fight against terrorism and on illegal emigration, defining it as "fundamental, strategic, unavoidable." Al-Sisi also guaranteed his "willingness" and "great desire" to shed light on the murder of Giulio Regeni.<sup>69</sup> A few days later, on 5 August 2018, Foreign Minister Enzo Moavero Milanesi met with Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry. It was the first visit by an Italian foreign minister to Egypt since 2015.<sup>70</sup> Once again, the Italian authorities welcomed the Egyptian state's willingness to achieve concrete results in the murder of the Italian researcher. On 29 August 2018, it was Deputy Prime

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<sup>67</sup> «Giulio Regeni, Renzi: "Egitto amico, ma non accetteremo una verità raccogliatrice"», *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 21 February 2016, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2016/02/21/regeni-renzi-egitto-amico-ma-non-accetteremo-una-verita-raccogliatrice/2483737/>, accessed 4 January 2022.

<sup>68</sup> Camera dei deputati, Commissione Regeni, audizione Renzi, [https://www.camera.it/leg18/1132?shadow\\_primapagina=11502](https://www.camera.it/leg18/1132?shadow_primapagina=11502).

<sup>69</sup> «Regeni, Salvini va in Egitto a incontrare Al Sisi. E poi dice: "Giustizia egiziana sarà rapida". L'omicidio due anni e mezzo fa», *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 18 July 2018, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/07/18/regeni-salvini-va-in-egitto-a-incontrare-al-sisi-e-poi-dice-giustizia-egiziana-sara-rapida-lomicidio-due-anni-e-mezzo-fa/4501798/>, accessed 4 January 2022.

<sup>70</sup> «Regeni, Moavero in Egitto: prima visita di un ministro italiano dall'omicidio. "Anche il Cairo vuole verità"», *La Repubblica*, 5 August 2018, [https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/08/05/news/moavero\\_volonta\\_dell\\_egitto\\_per\\_la\\_verita\\_su\\_regeni-203448486/](https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/08/05/news/moavero_volonta_dell_egitto_per_la_verita_su_regeni-203448486/), accessed 16 December 2021.

Minister and Minister of Economic Development Luigi Di Maio who met with the Egyptian President. On this occasion, President el-Sisi uttered the phrase: “Giulio Regeni is one of us.”<sup>71</sup>

When the Egyptian authorities declared that they could not unequivocally direct the investigation into the seven National Security officials entered in the register of suspects, the Italian magistrates decided to proceed independently. On 29 November 2018, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Roberto Fico, announced the suspension of relations with the Egyptian Parliament “until there is a real breakthrough in the investigation and a conclusive process.”<sup>72</sup> However, bilateral relations seem to remain untouched. During the hearing before the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the death of Giulio Regeni on 30 September 2021, in his capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Luigi Di Maio stated that:

It is worth recalling that Cairo remains an inescapable interlocutor in a plurality of areas of cooperation in geopolitical quadrants: from regional crisis management to counterterrorism and trafficking, via migration management and energy cooperation. These are dossiers that directly affect our security and national interests; I would particularly mention the stabilisation of Libya and the prospects for the Middle East peace process. But I want to be very clear: all these considerations on Egypt’s international role do not and will not diminish the commitment of the entire government to continue to demand that the truth about Giulio’s tragic death be established. This objective has been and will remain an indispensable reference in our relations with Egypt.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the fact that the then Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and the current Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio have continuously reiterated their willingness to obtain justice, Egypt keeps facing the case with its usual uncooperative attitude. Meanwhile, bilateral relations between the two Mediterranean countries are being increasingly strengthened, particularly at the economic and trade level.

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<sup>71</sup> Noury, R., «'Giulio Regeni è uno di noi', perché quella frase al-Sisi non doveva proprio dirla», *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 30 August 2018, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/08/30/giulio-regeni-e-uno-di-noi-perche-quella-frase-al-sisi-non-doveva-proprio-dirla/4590946/>, accessed 5 January 2022.

<sup>72</sup> «Regeni, Fico: “La Camera sospende i rapporti con il Parlamento egiziano”», *La Repubblica*, 29 November 2018, [https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/11/29/news/regeni\\_fico\\_la\\_camera\\_sospende\\_i\\_rapporti\\_con\\_il\\_parlamento\\_egiziano\\_-212954848/](https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/11/29/news/regeni_fico_la_camera_sospende_i_rapporti_con_il_parlamento_egiziano_-212954848/), accessed 5 January 2022.

<sup>73</sup> Youtube channel of La Repubblica, «Caso Regeni, Di Maio: “L’Egitto rappresenta un interlocutore ineludibile”», <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzcOZgzCCM>, accessed 4 January 2022.



### 3.4.2 Commercial exchanges, investments and enterprises

Economic and commercial relations between Italy and Egypt have historically always been significant. The reasons can be traced back to Italy's strong energy dependence, to the Egyptian state's relative wealth of hydrocarbons and to Cairo's strategic position in the Middle East. Despite the fact that the dramatic events linked to the el-Sisi's rise to power have closely involved Italy with the heinous murder of Giulio Regeni in 2016, and despite the unsuccessful investigations on the case and the uncooperativeness of the Egyptian authorities, bilateral relations between Italy and Egypt have not been called into question. On a phone call on 20 November 2020, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and el-Sisi expressed their willingness to continue cooperating, especially as regards trade and investment.<sup>74</sup> Good economic ties tend to symbolise a strong state of health between two nations, and if we consider the evolution of Italy as supplier and customer of Egypt we can even notice how bilateral trade between them has never been so fruitful.

To confirm this is Egyp2022, an international oil and gas exhibition whose fifth edition was held in Cairo from 14 to 16 February 2022. Egyp2022, which attracted 450 exhibitors, 25 major oil companies, 1,900 delegates from governments and international organisations and 260 speakers, has seen the participation of the largest delegation of Italian companies since it was established.<sup>75</sup> 49 small and medium-sized Italian enterprises came from various sectors of the oil and gas industry, from refining plants to high-tech products and plant engineering, and were not only companies that possess consolidated relations with Egypt but also companies that have come for the first time to present their products on the Egyptian market. At a time when Cairo is facing international criticism for its lack of respect for human rights and freedom of expression, two agreements were signed between Italian companies and the Egyptian government: a memorandum of understanding to promote emissions reduction, clean energy and hydrogen production at oil sites (between the Egyptian Petrochemical Company, Echem, and Eni's subsidiary in Egypt, Ieoc) and an agreement aimed at creating an Italian-Egyptian joint company for the conversion of compressed and liquefied gas vehicles (between the Ministry of Military Production and the Italian company Landi Renzo). The oil and gas sector

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<sup>74</sup> «Egypt, Italy discuss Regeni case, situation in Eastern Mediterranean and Libya crises», *Egypt Independent*, 21 November 2020, <https://egyptindependent.com/egypt-italy-discuss-regeni-case-situation-in-eastern-mediterranean-and-libya-crises/>, accessed 19 January 2022.

<sup>75</sup> «Egyp2022: mai così tante aziende italiane alla fiera internazionale del petrolio e del gas», *Nova News*, 17 February 2022, <https://www.agenzianova.com/news/egyp2022-mai-cosi-tante-aziende-italiane-alla-fiera-internazionale-del-petrolio-e-del-gas/>, accessed 24 January 2022.

in Egypt is booming and the opportunities that the Egyptian market offers to the Italian companies are hence manifold.

Every year infoMercatiEsteri, the economic observatory of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, provides detailed information about Italy's commercial interchanges with foreign markets. According to this data, Italy is currently Egypt's third largest export destination market and Egypt's seventh supplier. Trade cooperation between the two countries covers a wide range of sectors. Italy is exporting machinery, transportation equipment, coke and refined petroleum products, metal products, chemical products and electrical equipment, destining Egypt an export value of 3.23 billion euros. Egypt, on the other hand, destines to Italy an export value of 1.84 billion euros, primarily conveying coke and refined petroleum products, textiles and leather, rubber and plastic products and other non-metallic mineral products. Here are the detailed numbers updated to March 2022:

<b>Italy's exports to Egypt</b>	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ranking	6 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>
Market share (%)	4.5	4.6	6.6	4.4	4.0	4.3	3.5
Value (mln €)	2,951	3,088	2,916	2,684	2,418	3,077	3,800

<b>Italy's imports from Egypt</b>	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ranking	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Market share (%)	7.4	6.5	8.3	7.1	5.6	5.2	5.8
Value (mln €)	1,985	1,537	1,825	2,106	1,928	1,604	2,011

<b>Trade exchange</b>	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Value (mln €)	4.936	4.625	4.741	4.790	4.347	4.681	5.127*

\* January-November.

Source: [https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2020/03/indicatori\\_egitto\\_27\\_03\\_2020.pdf](https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2020/03/indicatori_egitto_27_03_2020.pdf),  
[https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/osservatorio/schede-sintesi/egitto\\_101.pdf](https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/osservatorio/schede-sintesi/egitto_101.pdf),  
[https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/scambi\\_commerciali.php?id\\_paesi=101#](https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/scambi_commerciali.php?id_paesi=101#).

By analysing the three-year period 2015-2017, from the year before to the year after the disappearance and death of the Italian researcher, it emerges that the market share of the Italian exports to Egypt has increased by 2.1 percent and the market share of the Italian imports from Egypt by 0.9 percent – even if both their values in million euros have slightly decreased.

The share of the Italian net foreign direct investments in Egypt records positive numbers too. In 2020, the last updated data, their value reached 258 million euros and the major areas of investment concerned the financial and banking sectors, infrastructure, tourism and information and communication technology (ICT).

<b>Italy's net foreign direct investments with Egypt</b>	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Italy net FDIs in Egypt (mln €)	1,502	168	700	246	637	258
Egypt net FDIs in Italy (mln €)	-3	-20	-10	6	-2	1

Source: [https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/osservatorio/schede-sintesi/egitto\\_101.pdf](https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/osservatorio/schede-sintesi/egitto_101.pdf).

The number of Italian companies investing in the Egyptian economy is of paramount importance: as of 31 December 2017, they amounted to 142, mainly operating in the energy, textile, and construction sectors, employing 10.486 people with a total turnover of 4.403 million euros.<sup>76</sup> Among them are Edison, Intesa Sanpaolo, Pirelli, Italcementi, Ansaldo, Tecnimont, Danieli, Techint and Cementir.

The most significant investment area involves the energy sector. An essential partner in the development of the Egyptian energy field is Eni (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi), an Italian multinational company headquartered in Rome and one of the seven biggest oil companies in the world. Eni settled in Egypt in 1954 thanks to the economic policy of its founder, Enrico Mattei. As opposed to the vision of most of the Western oil companies, which preferred focussing on their economic interests rather than on dialogue and cooperation with oil-producing countries, Mattei's vision embraced the Arab countries' cause and strongly sustained their economic growth. This strategy was encapsulated by the Mattei Formula, a collaboration plan that promoted programs for development and modernisation; it was revolutionary since it created a relationship capital between oil producers and oil consumers and gave the first more independence in controlling oil production. When Eni started operating in Egypt, it soon acquired shares of the International Egyptian Oil Company (IEOC) and managed to fully own it in 1961. From that moment, it successfully strengthened its presence in the Egyptian territory and started conducting its major exploration activities in three main hydrocarbon provinces: the Western Desert, the Nile Delta/Mediterranean offshore and the Gulf of Suez/Red Sea. In 1955,

<sup>76</sup> InfoMercatiEsteri, Osservatorio economico. Scheda di Sintesi: Egitto, [https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/osservatorio/schede-sintesi/egitto\\_101.pdf](https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/osservatorio/schede-sintesi/egitto_101.pdf).

Eni made the first oil discovery in the Sinai region (Gulf of Suez), in 1967 its first natural gas discovery in the Nile Delta.

Eni's role in Egypt undertook a relevant shift in 2015. At that time, the company signed an agreement for a five-billion-dollar investment to develop Egyptian mineral resources and address Egypt's energy shortages. This agreement was followed by the discovery of huge offshore gas fields on the Egyptian coast: the Zohr field in the Shorouk concession, which it holds for 50 percent, and the Nooros field in the Abu Madi West concession, in which it operates with an interest of 75 percent. Zohr is considered to be the largest gas discovery in the Mediterranean and one of the largest in the world.

Exploration activities, which are always regulated by Production Sharing Agreements (PSA), kept (and keep) increasing and bearing fruits. In its field development projects, Eni has increasingly approached the topic of sustainability and has started to deal with hydrogen production and water saving. In March 2021, the Italian multinational resumed production at the Damietta liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant, whose start-up operations began in 2004 but were interrupted in 2012. Owned by SEGAS (50 percent Eni, 40 percent EGAS, 10 percent EGPC), the Damietta plant represents a fundamental resource for energy transition. In July 2021, the multinational signed an agreement with the Egyptian Electricity Holding Company (EEHC) and the Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS), with the aim of producing green hydrogen using electricity generated from renewable sources and blue hydrogen through the storage of CO<sub>2</sub> in depleted natural gas fields.<sup>77</sup> Eni has also entered the world of retail market, in particular through a partnership with the Egyptian International Gas Technology (Gastec) for the opening of service stations for refuelling cars with natural gas and traditional fuels. Moreover, with the company EniProgetti, 100 percent controlled by Eni itself, the Italian company provides engineering and construction services for the management of hydrocarbons. This is all part of Egypt's energy transition strategy and an important step for the achievement of net zero emissions by 2050.

Furthermore, the presence of Eni in Egypt has always aimed at promoting a fair and sustainable local development, constantly improving access to healthcare and education, first fighting against colonialism and recently embracing the concepts of environmental and social justice. A big part of the multinational's budget is indeed addressed to several sustainability and health initiatives (12 million dollars for the period 2021-2024) and to training and building

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<sup>77</sup> «Eni signs an agreement to produce hydrogen in Egypt», *Eni*, 8 July 2021, <https://www.eni.com/en-IT/media/press-release/2021/07/cs-eni-firma-accordo-produzione-idrogeno-egitto.html>, accessed 6 December 2021.

capacities (58 million dollars). Cooperation has increasingly consolidated over the last twenty years, from the several donations to medical, religious and cultural infrastructure (such as the Italian Hospital in Cairo, the Saint Catherine Monastery and the Don Bosco Institute) to the recent inauguration, in Port Said, of a primary healthcare centre, a youth centre and an applied technology school.

In January 2022, following the participation in the 2021 *Egypt International Bid Round for Petroleum Exploration and Exploitation*, Eni has been awarded five new exploration licences, for of which as an operator. These are located in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Suez Gulf and the Western Desert and cover a total area of approximately 8,410 square kilometres.<sup>78</sup>

All these recent activities are an evident sign that, for Eni, the Egyptian territory is still today an important building block in the creation of a larger and richer gas hub in the eastern Mediterranean region. Indeed, the Italian company currently fancies itself as Egypt's main oil producer, contributing, in 2021, with 30 million barrels of annual oil and condensate production, 15.2 billion cubic metres of annual natural gas production and 131 million barrels of oil equivalent of annual hydrocarbon production.<sup>79</sup> Regardless of the serious human rights violations under the el-Sisi regime and the uncooperative behaviour of the Egyptian government in Regeni's case, Eni keeps collaborating with the Egyptian authorities in order to achieve its economic objectives.

### 3.4.3 The armaments industry

The year 2020 has seen Italy as the bigger supplier of arms to Egypt for the second year running, with a volume of licenses of 991.2 million euros.<sup>80</sup>

According to the data provided by the annual Italian government 'Report on Operations Authorised and Carried Out for the Control of Exports, Imports and Transit of Armaments Materials', the 2020 volume of the Italian military exports to all countries has decreased by 25 percent compared to 2019. It should however be remembered that 2020 was the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a very strong impact on the international flow of goods; therefore, although the drop in sales was substantial, it does not seem to have overwhelmed the

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<sup>78</sup> «Eni awarded five Exploration Licenses in Egypt», *Eni*, 10 January 2022, <https://www.eni.com/en-IT/media/press-release/2022/01/eni-awarded-five-exploration-licenses-egypt.html>, accessed 12 January 2022.

<sup>79</sup> «Our work in Egypt», *Eni*, <https://www.eni.com/en-IT/eni-worldwide/africa/egypt.html>, accessed 6 February 2022.

<sup>80</sup> «Export armi italiane: nel 2020 autorizzati quasi 4 miliardi, Egitto primo acquirente», *Rete Pace Disarmo*, 28 April 2021, <https://retepacedisarmo.org/2021/export-armi-italiane-2020-4-miliardi-egitto-primo-acquirente/>, accessed 16 February 2022.

armaments sector so much. What causes even more concern is the fact that for the fifth year running, namely from the 2016 Renzi Cabinet onwards, more than half of the Italian armaments and military systems have been destined for countries that are not part of the European Union or of NATO, namely for areas of great tension such as the Middle East and North Africa, hence contributing to the instability of entire regions. This shows that the products of the so-called ‘defence industry’ serve very little purpose in defence and security but are instead meant to support Italian commercial and economic interests.

The three years straddling 2016, the year of Giulio Regeni’s murder, have marked record numbers in terms of Italian authorisations to arms exports to Egypt: they reached a volume of 8.2 billion euros in 2015, increased to a total of 14.9 billion euros in 2016 and slightly dropped to 10.3 billion euros in 2017. The numbers have then stabilised on a constant level, amounting to about 5 billion euros both in 2018 and in 2019.<sup>81</sup>

This huge flow of commercial exchanges features important players of the Italian industry, among which Leonardo S.p.A. (previously Finmeccanica S.p.A.), active in the defence, aerospace and security sectors, and Fincantieri S.p.A., operating in the shipbuilding sector and Europe’s largest shipbuilding group. It should be highlighted that Leonardo’s major shareholder is the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance, which possesses 30.2 percent of its actions,<sup>82</sup> and that 71.3 percent of Fincantieri’s shares belong to Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP) Industria S.p.A., which is managed by the Italian Ministry of the Economy for 82.77 percent of its share capital.<sup>83</sup> It is again extremely clear that the production and sale of Italian war material does not respond so much to Italy’s defence needs as to the profit motive of the companies producing it, especially those controlled by the state.

In 2019, Leonardo and the Egyptian Ministry of Defence concluded a huge commercial deal: the Italian company sold Egypt 32 AugustaWestland helicopters, reaching a total value of 871.7 million euros. Negotiations between the two counterparts were kept secret and the public opinion only came to fruition on 7 May 2020,<sup>84</sup> when the Italian government announced the authorisation of arms exports which took place a year before.<sup>85</sup> In 2021, the industrial

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<sup>81</sup> «Export armi italiane: nel 2019 autorizzati 5,17 miliardi, Egitto primo acquirente», *Disarmo.org*, 15 May 2020, <https://www.disarmo.org/rete/a/47656.html>, accessed 16 February 2022.

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.leonardo.com/en/investors/stock-info/shareholders-base>, accessed 16 February 2022.

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.fincantieri.com/en/governance/shareholders/>, accessed 16 February 2022.

<sup>84</sup> Camera dei deputati, Relazione sulle operazioni autorizzate e svolte per il controllo dell’esportazione, importazione e transito dei materiali di armamento, [http://documenti.camera.it/\\_dati/leg18/lavori/documentiparlamentari/IndiceETesti/067/003v01\\_RS/INTERO\\_COM.pdf](http://documenti.camera.it/_dati/leg18/lavori/documentiparlamentari/IndiceETesti/067/003v01_RS/INTERO_COM.pdf), accessed 18 February 2022.

<sup>85</sup> Mazzeo, A., «Regeni e Zaki non contano: altra fornitura di elicotteri di Leonardo all’Egitto», *AgoraVox*, 24 September 2021, <https://www.agoravox.it/Regeni-e-Zaki-non-contano-altra.html>, accessed 16 February 2022.

consortium MBDA, Leonardo's subsidiary, sold the Egyptian Navy several VL-MICA NG air defence missiles and about 50 SCALP long-range cruise missiles to arm the fighter-bombers of the Egyptian Air Force; the last ones have an estimated cost of 1.35 million euros each. More recently, in December 2021, it was announced that the Egyptian order for 24 M-346 aircraft produced by Leonardo is about to materialise; according to *African Intelligence*,<sup>86</sup> this order would be worth around half a billion euros.

Fincantieri's business in Egypt is also booming. In 2019, Egyptian authorities showed their interest for 2 FREMM Bergamini frigates, the Spartaco Schergat and the Emilio Bianchi, produced by Fincantieri as part of the FREMM programme between the Italian and French defence industries. The reported deal, however, is not limited to this. It should include another 5 frigates belonging to Fincantieri, 24 Eurofighter Typhoon jets, 20 offshore patrol vessels (OPV), 20 M-346 trainer jets produced by Leonardo and one military satellite. With a total export value between 9 and 11 billion euros, this would be Italy's largest arms export of the post-war period and the most significant arms import ever signed by Egypt; the maxi-order was therefore nicknamed 'the deal of the century'. In this regard, on 16 July 2020, the Italian Senate's Public Meeting directed an interrogation to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Luigi Di Maio: "Cairo remains one of the fundamental interlocutors in the Mediterranean quadrant", answered Di Maio. "The evaluations on the sale of armaments to Egypt are still in progress."<sup>87</sup> On 23 December 2020, Fincantieri delivered to the Alexandria Naval Base and to the Egyptian Navy's fleet a first frigate. The handover was muted and unpublicised: there was no official communiqué from the Trieste shipbuilding group, nor was the Conte executive present at the ceremony. Largely due to this order, even if the pandemic provoked a sharp decline in commercial flows, the Conte II Cabinet increased the number of licences for military exports to Egypt by 120 million euros more than 2019. The second frigate was handed over to the Egyptian Navy on 15 April 2021.

Ever since the first announcements about 'the deal of the century', civil society associations have promoted the '#StopArmiEgitto' initiative to ask the Italian government for an immediate block of the military supplies to Egypt. The Italian trade unions Cgil, Cisl and Uil have also taken a tough stance against the supply of military systems to Egypt and have formalised their support for the national mobilisation, raising awareness of an issue that directly

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<sup>86</sup> «Leonardo close to selling its training jet to Egyptian Air Force», *Africa Intelligence*, 14 December 2021, [https://www.africaintelligence.com/north-africa\\_business/2021/12/14/leonardo-close-to-selling-its-training-jet-to-egyptian-air-force,109711171-art](https://www.africaintelligence.com/north-africa_business/2021/12/14/leonardo-close-to-selling-its-training-jet-to-egyptian-air-force,109711171-art), accessed 17 February 2022.

<sup>87</sup> Senato della Repubblica, 241a Seduta Pubblica, <https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/BGT/1158583.pdf>, accessed 16 February 2022.

affects the labour market, namely the production and trade in armaments. An interruption of the armaments sales, however, has never happened so far.

The Italian government is cultivating its trade relations with the Egyptian military industry not only through pure commercial exchanges, but also through a strong involvement in the Egypt Defence Expo (EDEX), the international exhibition of war industry that took place in Cairo from 29 November to 2 December 2021. The fair was promoted and sponsored by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, by the Ministry of Defence and the Supreme Command of the Egyptian Armed Forces, and its sole headline sponsor was the Italian company Fincantieri itself.

Several banks and credit agencies are also committing themselves to finance Egypt with the loans to pay armaments; among the most important names are Sace, Intesa Sanpaolo, Bnp Paribas and Santander.

By selling arms and military equipment to the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Italian government is financing a state that not only constantly violates human rights, but that is also involved in situations of war. Since 2015, Egypt has been part of an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia and engaged in the fight against the Shiite Houthi rebels in Yemen, a full-fledged war that has produced over 100,000 deaths in four years. Egypt is also actively influencing the Libyan scenario, where the regime has recently deployed troops in support of Khalifa Haftar, the strongman of Cyrenaica who controls the south and east of Libya. However, Haftar is the direct competitor of Fayed al-Serraj, whose government is supported by Italy and the United Nations, and the main obstacle to the pacification of the area. By selling military equipment to Egypt, Italy is arming one of its direct competitors in what is still a very delicate war situation.

A democracy that establishes such military collaborations must be accused of a serious deficit of legality. Trade in armaments and war material between Italy and Egypt is indeed not only ethically questionable, but expressly forbidden by an Italian law. Italian Law No. 185 of 9 July 1990 regulates the 'New provisions on controlling the export, import and transit of military goods'. Chapter I reads that:

The export, import, transit, intra-Community transfer and brokering in military goods, as well as the transfer of the relative production licences and the delocalisation of production must be in line with Italy's foreign and defence policies [and] are prohibited if they in contrast with the Constitution, Italy's international commitments, non-proliferation agreements and the fundamental security interests of the State, the struggle against terrorism and maintaining good



relationships with other Countries and in case there are no adequate guarantees on the final destination of the military goods.

Moreover, it clearly prohibits the export of military goods “to Countries [...] in violation of the principles laid down in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter” and “to Countries whose governments are responsible of serious violations of international conventions on human rights, verified by competent organisations of the United Nations, the EU or the Council of Europe”.<sup>88</sup>

The aforementioned Article 51 of the United Nations Charter refers to the ‘Action with respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression’ and reads as follows:

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.

The Italian law is then flanked by various international regulations. The European Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP, adopted and entered into force on 8 December 2008, defines common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment. Of significant importance is Criterion 2 contained in Article 2, which states that export of military technology shall be denied to countries that do not respect human rights or international humanitarian law. Moreover, the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which came into force on 24 December 2014, regulates the international trade of arms too, banning export of military equipment even if human rights violations are *suspected*:

Each exporting State Party [...] shall [...] assess the potential that the conventional arms of items [...] could be used to [...] commit or facilitate a serious violation of international human rights law.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, Law No. 185 of 9 July 1990, [https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2017/06/legge\\_09\\_07\\_1990\\_n185.pdf](https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2017/06/legge_09_07_1990_n185.pdf).

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.thearmstradetreaty.org/hyper-images/file/TheArmsTradeTreaty1/TheArmsTradeTreaty.pdf>.

Italian and international law are therefore very clear on the regulation of the trade of military goods. However, they continue to be broken far too many times.

#### 3.4.4 International and national security and migration flows

The relationship between Italy and Egypt is not limited to economic and trade issues but has often been read also as a means to preserve the geopolitical stability of a region with a complex and very fragmented balance of power, namely the Middle East and North Africa.

Due to its history and geographical position, Egypt has maintained a good relationship with Israel for over 40 years, acting as a mediator between this country and the representatives of the Palestinian territories. Relations between the two countries have been intensifying in recent years, when the current Egyptian President el-Sisi initiated an all-out war against the paramilitary organisation Hamas, operational arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. Currently controlling the Gaza Strip, Hamas aims at the return of Palestine to its pre-colonial condition, at the establishment of a Palestinian state and at fighting the State of Israel. It has committed and claimed several suicide attacks against Israeli civilians and has repeatedly attacked Israel with rockets. Therefore, Human Rights Watch accuses it of war crimes and crimes against humanity, while both Israel and the European Union designate it as a terrorist organisation. Breaking relations with el-Sisi would therefore represent a risk in terms of security, as it would likely open a crisis and destabilise the Middle Eastern area.

Undermining el-Sisi's authority would also likely mean undermining el-Sisi's fight against Islamist terrorism and the self-proclaimed Islamic State, which the Egyptian regime has so far been able to contain and repress. This is however a very controversial position, strongly contested by civil society. As analysed in Chapter 2, the Egyptian regime often uses this fight against terrorism as an excuse to silence all kinds of political and social opposition. According to various human rights organisations, supporting this fight against terrorism also means supporting the crimes that the Egyptian security forces are constantly and terribly committing.

Good relationships between Italy and Egypt are fundamental in the management of migration flows too. In this regard, bilateral cooperation between the two countries intensified in the period of the Arab Uprisings, when a high number of Middle Eastern citizens started to exponentially migrate to the European continent. Italy and Egypt have therefore started to reach *gentlemen's agreements*, informal deals to have a better management on migration and borders. In 2017, to further develop this collaboration, the Italian Interior Ministry headed by Marco Minniti stipulated a technical understanding with the Egyptian Police Academy and Interior

Ministry to combat human trafficking and organised crime in African countries involved in migration flows. From there, in 2018, the project ‘International Training at Egyptian Police Academy’ (ITEPA), an international training centre on migration issues for police and border officers from several African countries established right at the Egyptian Police Academy in Cairo and financed to the tune of 1.8 million euros by the Italian government.<sup>90</sup> Italy, therefore, not only collaborates with Egypt, but also invests money to better control and regulate the situation. Numbers have been high even in recent years: in 2020 alone, more than 1,200 migrants arrived in Italy from Egypt, a number that would most likely rise without the good relations between the two countries. Given the priority of European countries, especially Italy, to curb migration flows from the African continent, Cairo has the power to threaten to reconsider bilateral cooperation on irregular migration.<sup>91</sup>

Italy also counts on Cairo for the stabilisation of Libya, which it considers fundamental for three main reasons: to halt migration flows, to repress the threat of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and to protect Italian companies’ oil and natural gas assets. The regime of el-Sisi plays a pivotal role in the Libyan scenario: it has a strong influence on Khalifa Belqasim Haftar, commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA) based in Tobruk, Cyrenaica and supporter of Fatih Bashagha, who was appointed Prime Minister by the Tobruk Parliament, in opposition to the provisional Government of National Unity of Abdul Hamid Dbeibah (recognised by the United Nations) on 10 February 2022. The attempts by the Italian authorities to create and consolidate a solid link with Egypt on the Libyan crisis were several. During an interview in 2017, the then Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Angelino Alfano stated that “Egypt is an indispensable actor in the solution of the Libyan crisis.”<sup>92</sup> The theme was discussed in a conversation between the then Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni and the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi during their meeting in New York, on the side-lines of the United Nations General Assembly, on 20 September 2017 – meeting in which el-Sisi also affirmed Egypt’s total determination to uncover the truth about the Regeni case<sup>93</sup> – and in a telephone conversation between the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and the Egyptian President on

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<sup>90</sup> Facchini, D., «Italia-Egitto: il ministero dell’Interno si rifiuta di diffondere l’accordo di polizia sui migranti», *Altreconomia*, 28 January 2019, <https://altreconomia.it/italia-egitto-accordo-migranti/>, accessed 27 February 2022.

<sup>91</sup> Meringolo, A., Palm, A., «Italia-Egitto: occhi puntati su collaborazione migratoria», *Affari Internazionali*, 2 October 2016, <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/2016/10/italia-egitto-occhi-puntati-su-collaborazione-migratoria/>, accessed 1 March 2022.

<sup>92</sup> Alfano: “Dialogare con l’Egitto per stabilizzare la Libia”, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 29 August 2017, [https://www.esteri.it/it/sala\\_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2017/08/alfano-dialogare-con-l-egitto-per/](https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2017/08/alfano-dialogare-con-l-egitto-per/), accessed 19 January 2022.

<sup>93</sup> «Regeni e Libia, Gentiloni ne discute con Sisi», *Il Manifesto*, 22 September 2017, <https://ilmanifesto.it/regeni-e-libia-gentiloni-ne-discute-con-sisi>, accessed 19 January 2022.

7 June 2020.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, however, Khalifa Haftar is not supported by the United Nations and the majority of the Western community, and this puts Italy in a difficult and compromising position. El-Sisi's endorsement for Haftar makes it difficult to find a solution to the Libyan crisis and indirectly increases departures from Libya to Italy. On the other hand, however, Italy currently has neither a clear and defined strategy nor a voice in Libya and is therefore forced to wait and see.

This overriding need for political stability and Egypt's responsibility in terms of security management and counterterrorism has led to a positive development in relations between Italy and Egypt, despite the tragic case of Giulio Regeni.

### **3.5 Should Italy-Egypt relations be interrupted?**

According to some scholars and experts of international relations, breaking off relations with Egypt would put pressure on the regime of el-Sisi and foster cooperation in the case of Giulio Regeni. In their view, Italy should band its fists on the table, send a strong signal to the Egyptian authorities and fight in the name of human rights, truth and justice. This is the position, for example, of Giulio Regeni's parents, who for years have been asking for the Italian ambassador to Egypt to be recalled. The recall of the then ambassador in Cairo Maurizio Massari on 8 April 2016 had no particular effect, but today it would at least contribute to bringing the Regeni case back into the media spotlight. The interruption of relations between two countries is however a very complex and delicate issue and contains harsher gradations of intensity. A softer decision is the one taken in November 2018, when, by decision of the President of the Chamber of Deputies Roberto Fico, the Italian Chamber has suspended all relations with the Egyptian parliament at least until the achievement of a real breakthrough in the investigation and a conclusive trial.<sup>95</sup> On the other side, one of the most drastic measures would be the interruption of trade relations between Italy and Egypt, a clear-cut decision that the Italian government has no intention of implementing.

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<sup>94</sup> «Conte telefona a al-Sisi: al centro del colloquio il caso Regeni e la situazione in Libia», *La Repubblica*, 7 June 2020, [https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2020/06/07/news/conte\\_telefona\\_a\\_al\\_sisi\\_al\\_centro\\_del\\_colloquio\\_il\\_caso\\_regeni\\_e\\_la\\_situazione\\_in\\_libia-258656589/](https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2020/06/07/news/conte_telefona_a_al_sisi_al_centro_del_colloquio_il_caso_regeni_e_la_situazione_in_libia-258656589/), accessed 19 January 2022.

<sup>95</sup> «Regeni, Fico: “La Camera sospende i rapporti con il Parlamento egiziano”», *La Repubblica*, 29 November 2018, [https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/11/29/news/regeni\\_fico\\_la\\_camera\\_sospende\\_i\\_rapporti\\_con\\_il\\_parlamento\\_egiziano\\_-212954848/](https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/11/29/news/regeni_fico_la_camera_sospende_i_rapporti_con_il_parlamento_egiziano_-212954848/), accessed 5 January 2022.

Supporters of the soft line towards Egypt expose instead several grounds for not breaking relations with Egypt. The first reason is a geographical strategic issue: Egypt is a key player in the Mediterranean area as it links North Africa to the Middle East and controls the Suez Canal, while Italy is a country that hugely depends on the sea and on the continuity of maritime routes, especially the one which provides a connection with the Horn of Africa, the Persian Gulf and the East Asian markets. Second, because of commercial and economic reasons and of the presence of a high number of Italian enterprises in the Egyptian business landscape, the most important of which is the multinational oil and gas company Eni. An interruption in relations with Egypt would put at risk Italian supremacy in the area, with the danger of being supplanted by other oil companies, especially French ones. Another point hammered out by advocates of diplomatic continuity with Egypt concerns the stability of the Middle East and North Africa, an area where the balance of power is extremely fragmented. Moreover, Egypt's good relations with Israel and el-Sisi's intransigent attitude against Islamist terrorism has made it one of the states helping to maintain a relative geopolitical order in the region. The last arrow in the bow of those who want to avoid a break in relations with Egypt is the management of migration flows from Africa, which would most likely increase if the relationship between the two countries was severed. Therefore, according to this vision, Italy cannot afford to ignore Egypt but should instead manage to cultivate a framework of dialogue and cooperativeness. Support for the Egyptian regime has however not led to any significant change so far and has not allowed Italy to exert a political influence on Egypt. Instead, it has acquiesced to one of the most serious human rights crises in Egyptian recent history. This certainly cannot be considered a goal compatible with the interests of the Italian country. As evidenced by the energy issue and the agreements on the sale of armaments, it is therefore clear that those who have strong interests in Egypt are the big Italian industrial groups, in particular Eni, Leonardo and Fincantieri.

Normalising relations with the Egyptian state means legitimising the el-Sisi regime, its ongoing violations of human rights and its uncooperativeness on the murder of Giulio Regeni. The Rome Public Prosecutor's Office has given the names and surnames of the accused members of the state apparatus, but it is unable to move forward because the domiciles to which the notification of the trial is to be sent are not disclosed. How can this go hand in hand with good business relations and with the trade of military armaments? How can the abuse of fundamental human rights not affect international relations? Yet neither from Italy nor from Europe comes any concrete action, neither sanctions nor an interruption of trade relations.



## Chapter 4

### Human rights and legal obligations

#### 4.1 The prohibition of torture

Since President Mohamed Morsi's overthrow in July 2013, several fundamental human rights have begun to be severely repressed in the Arab Republic of Egypt: a high number of human rights defenders, activists and political opponents have started being convicted after seriously flawed trials, detained in cruel and inhuman conditions and even sentenced to death by the Egyptian authorities. These are subjected to torture and cruel practices, such as beatings and electric shocks, or detained in solitary confinement for indefinite periods in appalling conditions.

Civil society has been denouncing these human rights violations for years now. The report 'Security Forces Dealt with Them: Suspicious Killings and Extrajudicial Executions by Egyptian Security Forces' by Human Rights Watch documents cases of enforced disappearance, secret detention, ill-treatment in custody and unlawful killing by the Egyptian National Security Agency (NSA) following the military ouster of 2013, defining the situation as "one of the worst prolonged human rights crises in the country's recent history." The Egyptian Interior Ministry reported 755 killings of alleged "militants" or "terrorist" between January 2015 and December 2020, accusing them of having caused several shootings and therefore obliged the NSA to respond with force. Human Rights Watch, however, documented that the victims did not represent an imminent danger and that the Egyptian government did not provide any kind of information about the circumstances of these events, hence not providing any evidence that the use of force by the Egyptian security forces was necessary. As denounced by most of their relatives, the victims had been often forcibly disappeared and their corpses presented evident signs of torture, while the families had no information about the place and conditions in which their loved ones were detained. Amnesty International's report 'This will only end when you die', published on 16 September 2021, also denounced the numerous and terrible abuses committed by the Egyptian NSA against all kinds of opposition groups. These are threatened, arrested, detained in awful conditions, tortured and ill-treated, prosecuted

without judicial orders and rarely have the possibility to resort to legal remedies (the lawyers are often not informed about the trial and are not provided with the documents of the cases).

This widespread use of cruel practices is used as an instrument of political repression by the Egyptian security forces. It is however not so easy to establish the exact number of victims, as many families prefer not to report violations rather than expose their detainees to greater visibility and thus greater danger. Meanwhile, the authorities of the Arab Republic of Egypt persist in denying the ongoing crimes they are committing. In 2015, the then Interior Minister Magdy Abdel Ghaffar declared that “there is no systematic torture nor forced disappearance in Egypt” and that “many cases of disappearance are nothing but cases of youth joining terrorist elements and organisations.”<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Assistant Director of Criminal Investigation in the Public Security Sector, Major General Alaa Farouk, added that the Interior Ministry had no interest at all in forcibly hiding such violations of human rights. Omar Marwan, Egyptian Minister of Justice, emphasised that all detainees were held according to the law. The same was publicly stated a year later by Secretary General of the ‘Long Live Egypt’ Coalition Tariq Mahmoud, who also accused many Egyptian and foreign human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, of reporting and spreading false information. During his speech before the United Nations Human Rights Council on 9 March 2017, Egypt’s permanent United Nations representative, Ambassador Amr Ramadan, declared that most of the detainees were persons accused of breaking the law or being members of terrorist groups. Even some members of the National Council for Human Rights, such as Hafez Abu Seda, stated that the allegations of enforced disappearance were just a lie by the Muslim Brotherhood to discredit Egypt’s image abroad and that most cases of detention concerned people who either joined terrorist organisations or migrated illegally. They even declared that the previous reports of enforced disappearance were wrong and that the human rights situation in Egypt was greatly improving in 2018.

#### 4.1.1 Human rights law

The prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is one of the most important norms in the international human rights system and is therefore firmly embedded in several regional and international treaties. The abolition of this cruel practice owes its roots to the common feeling of states after the Second World War, which

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<sup>96</sup> <https://www.ec-rf.net/3509/>.



wanted to fight against the terrible abuses perpetrated during that period and to fill the absence of specific rules on the protection of fundamental human rights in the United Nations Charter. It was therefore introduced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an international document drafted by a commission from different regions of the world – namely Lebanon, the USSR, China, France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Chile and Canada – and approved by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as Resolution 217A on 10 December 1948. Based on the notion of human dignity, the Universal Declaration was addressed to all human beings according to the principle of non-discrimination based on race, colour, gender, language, religion and social origin. The prohibition of torture is clearly enshrined in Article 5 of the Declaration, which states that “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

As it is a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, and therefore soft law, the Universal Declaration does not represent a legally binding instrument for states. Nevertheless, it is of fundamental importance since it paved the way for the drafting and adoption of an extensive network of treaties based on the protection of fundamental human rights. After the Declaration, the prohibition of torture has indeed been embodied in many universal and regional human rights instruments, for instance:

- the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (Article 5);
- the American Convention on Human Rights (Article 5);
- the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (Article 27);
- the Arab Charter on Human Rights (Article 8);
- the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (Articles 19, 20);
- the Charter of Paris for a New Europe;
- the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (Article 10);
- the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 37);
- the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment;
- the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Article 3);
- the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture;
- the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 4, 7, 10);

- the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Article 31).

The following analysis takes into account some of the most important legal instruments condemning torture, both in the framework of the United Nations and at the regional level.

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The first *ad hoc* instrument condemning torture is the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Being Subjected to Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted by UNGA Resolution 3452 (XXX) on 9 December 1975. Although the Declaration is not legally binding on states, it represents the first instrument to specifically analyse and regulate such prohibition and to provide a definition of the term “torture” (Article 1):

[...] any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted by or at the instigation of a public official on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or confession, punishing him for an act he has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating him or other persons.

It then outlines some important general lines of conduct to be followed when it comes to the prohibition of torture; these include the need to provide training programmes for public officials (Article 5), the inclusion of torture as a criminal offence in national legislation (Article 7), the obligation to impartially investigate and prosecute acts of torture (Articles 9, 10), and the possibility of compensation for victims (Article 11). Due to the importance of its themes, the Declaration prompted the conception and redaction of a binding treaty with the purpose to create an effective mechanism to ban this ill-treatment. This was realised in the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, or Convention against Torture (UNCAT), drafted on 10 December 1984 by UNGA Resolution 39/46 and entered into force on 26 June 1987 – date that was then selected to celebrate the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture from 1998. In its final version, this international human rights treaty provides a comprehensive definition of “torture” in Article 1, which reads as follows:

[...] any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

The definition underlines three distinctive elements: the severe intensity of pain or suffering, which can be physical and/or mental; the intentionality of the act, which can be inflicted to obtain information, extract confessions, punish, intimidate, coerce or discriminate; the status of the perpetrator, who must be a public official or a person acting in an official capacity.

At the same time, there is no universally accepted definition of the concepts of “inhuman or degrading treatment” and “inhuman or degrading punishment.” In this regard, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) tried to provide some standards<sup>97</sup> and stated that the severity of the treatment depends on four different elements: the duration of the treatment; the physical effects of the treatment; the mental effects of the treatment; the sex, age and state of health of the victim. The Court then indicated that the level of severity is high in cases of torture, medium in cases of inhuman or degrading treatments and low as regards inhuman or degrading punishments.

The Convention against Torture entails an Optional Protocol (OPCAT), adopted by UNGA Resolution A/RES/57/199 on 18 December 2002 and entered into force on 22 June 2006. It aims at overcoming the shortcomings of the treaty to which it refers and at helping states parties to meet their obligations under UNCAT; indeed, states parties to the OPCAT agree to be subject to the international inspections of the United Nations Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT) and to establish a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) to prevent or inspect alleged acts of torture.

The first universal legally binding treaty to contain a provision on the prohibition of torture at the United Nations level is however the International Covenant on Civil and Political

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<sup>97</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, «Interpretation of torture in the light of the practice and jurisprudence of international bodies», [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Torture/UNVFVT/Interpretation\\_torture\\_2011\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Torture/UNVFVT/Interpretation_torture_2011_EN.pdf), accessed 28 February 2022.

Rights (ICCPR), adopted by UNGA Resolution 2200A (XXI) on 16 December 1966 and entered into force on 23 March 1976. The reference articles are Article 7, which includes a provision prohibiting torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and Article 10(1), which stresses the respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. The ICCPR contains a First Optional Protocol, which has introduced an individual complaint mechanism against states which have ratified it, and a Second Optional Protocol, aiming at the abolition of death penalty.

It is important to notice that each of these legal instruments highlights the absolute nature of the prohibition of torture, which cannot be restricted neither by a state of war or a threat of war nor by internal political instability or any other public emergency. The prohibition of torture is one of those fundamental rights that states parties agree to respect and guarantee to all individuals under their jurisdiction.

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After having highlighted the most important actions undertaken within the framework of the United Nations, it is important to look at how the prohibition of torture is outlined in regional contexts. The first universally binding regional instrument is the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, or European Convention on Human Rights, drafted on 4 November 1950 by the then newly formed Council of Europe and entered into force on 3 September 1953. The American Convention on Human Rights, also known as Pact of San José, was then signed on 22 November 1969 and became effective on 18 July 1978. As for the European system, state parties undertake to respect and ensure human rights to all persons who are subject to their jurisdiction. Following the footsteps of the European and American Conventions, the Organisation of African Unity (replaced by the African Union in 2002) adopted the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on 1 June 1981, which came into effect on 21 October 1986. A last relevant regional legal instrument regarding human rights protection is the Arab Charter on Human Rights, adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States. The first version of the document was drafted on 15 September 1994 but proved to be a failure, since no state ratified it. The Charter was then updated on 22 May 2004 and finally entered into force on 15 March 2008. What all these treaties have in common is that they expressly prohibit torture (Article 3 of the European Convention, Article 5 of the American Convention, Article 5 of the African Convention, Article 13(a) of the Arab Charter). However, while the European, the American and the Arab Conventions clearly

highlight its non-derogation under any circumstances (respectively in Article 15(2), Article 27(2), and Article 4(c)), the African Convention does not contain any provisions to this respect.

Human rights, including the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, are implemented through United Nations treaty bodies and regional tribunals. Within the framework of the United Nations, these include the Committee Against Torture (CAT), which monitors the implementation of the UNCAT; the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT), established following the provisions of the OPCAT; and the Human Rights Committee (HRC), established by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The CAT and the HRC can receive individual complaints, but only if the state against which the complaint is made is a party of the respective Conventions and have ratified the respective Optional Protocols. The aforementioned treaties have established three respective regional tribunals: the European Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights, and the African Commission and Court of Human and Peoples' Rights. The Arab Charter on Human Rights lacks an enforcement mechanism.

Further specifications on the prohibition of torture or other ill-treatment are provided by a significant number of case laws, which constantly inspire international and regional bodies and gradually create a more consistent framework of international law. One of the most significant ones is the judgement 'Selmouni v. France' (ECtHR, Judgement of 28 July 1999), concerning the physical and psychological torture of a man sentenced to prison by police officers to extract a confession. The case recognised that the severity with which pain is caused and the intention to cause it to the victim are two elements that must exist in order for one to speak of torture.

#### 4.1.2 International criminal law

There are, however, other sources of international law: acts of torture may also be categorised as war crimes and crimes against humanity under international criminal law. While human rights law deals with state responsibility and aims at protecting the interests of individuals, international criminal law courts and tribunals deal with crimes for which individuals are responsible and aim at fighting against impunity. Of relevant importance are the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and for Rwanda (ICTR), which dealt respectively with war crimes that took place during the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s and with the judgement of individuals responsible for the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

As two *ad hoc* tribunals, the ICTY and the ICTR were dissolved respectively on 31 December 2017 and on 31 December 2016 and replaced by the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) in December 2010. As defined in their Statute, the ICTY and ICTR mandates aimed at covering, investigating and prosecuting several crimes including the crime of torture, considered both a crime against humanity and a war crime. None of the two provides a specific definition of the term “torture”; therefore, its definition has been elaborated through their extensive jurisprudence and making reference to other legal instruments and bodies, especially those concerning human rights.

An important contribution was given by the case ‘Prosecutor v. Anto Furundžija’ (ICTY, Judgement of 10 December 1998), which recognised that the prohibition of torture “has evolved into a peremptory norm or *jus cogens*, that is, a norm that enjoys a higher rank in the international hierarchy than treaty law and even ‘ordinary’ customary rules” (paragraph 153). Such norm is so far-reaching and well established in a number of international and legal instruments and case laws that it has acquired a *jus cogens* or peremptory status (binding on all states and never justifiable under any circumstances), thus giving rise to obligations *erga omnes* (obligations that the entire international community has the right to enforce) through the exercise of universal jurisdiction over suspects found in their territory (regardless of where the crime was committed and of the nationality of the accused). Therefore, notwithstanding the aforementioned conventions on human rights, the customary nature of the prohibition of torture enables states to exercise universal jurisdiction over acts of torture.

The work of the ICTY and the ICTR likely inspired the drafting of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on 17 July 1998, which became effective on 1 July 2002. Unlike the previous two tribunals, the Rome Statute provides a definition of the term “torture” in Article 7(2)(e), intended as:

the intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, upon a person in the custody or under the control of the accused; except that torture shall not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to, lawful sanctions

and defines it as a crime against humanity “when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack” in

Article 7(1). The Elements of Crimes<sup>98</sup> for the ICC then specifies that the crime against humanity of torture is characterised by the following elements:

1. The perpetrator inflicted severe physical or mental pain or suffering upon one or more persons.
2. Such person or persons were in the custody or under the control of the perpetrator
3. Such pain or suffering did not arise only from, and was not inherent in or incidental to, lawful sanctions.
4. The conduct was committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.
5. The perpetrator knew that the conduct was part of or intended the conduct to be part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.

Contrary to human rights law, here there is no reference either to the specific purpose of the perpetrator or to the status of the perpetrator as a public official or as a person acting in an official capacity.

The Rome Statute also defines torture as a war crime, namely as a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, in Article 8(2)(a). The elements of torture as a war crime listed by the ICC are the following:

1. The perpetrator inflicted severe physical or mental pain or suffering upon one or more persons.
2. The perpetrator inflicted the pain or suffering for such purposes as: obtaining information or a confession, punishment, intimidation or coercion or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind.
3. Such person or persons were protected under one or more of the Geneva Conventions of 1949.
4. The perpetrator was aware of the factual circumstances that established that protected status.
5. The conduct took place in the context of and was associated with an international armed conflict.
6. The perpetrator was aware of factual circumstances that established the existence of an armed conflict.

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<sup>98</sup> International Criminal Court, Elements of Crimes, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/Elements-of-Crimes.pdf>, accessed 2 March 2022.

In this regard, the ICC makes some distinctions between torture, inhuman treatment and wilfully causing great suffering as war crimes. What characterises torture, and differentiates it from the other two acts, is the specific intent of the perpetrators, who aim at obtaining information or confessions, at punishing, intimidating or coercing the victim; the severe physical or mental pain or suffering inflicted in the case of inhuman treatment or wilfully causing great suffering requires instead no purposive element.

#### 4.1.3 International humanitarian law

As one of the most universally recognised human rights, the prohibition of torture is also well established under customary international humanitarian law, the rules of international law universally applicable in situations of armed conflict. Torture, inhuman treatment, wilful causing of great suffering and serious injury to body or health are considered grave breaches of the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Additional Protocols, in situations of both international and non-international armed conflict and are hence considered war crimes.

## 4.2 Enforced disappearance

The frequent acts of torture by the Egyptian secret services are often linked to episodes of enforced disappearance. Indeed, since the rise of President el-Sisi, many students, academics, journalists, activists, peaceful protesters and political opponents, both men, women and young people, have been arbitrarily arrested by state agents and subjected to periods of enforced disappearance without having access neither to family nor to lawyers. According to some international organisations such as Amnesty International and the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, detainees are usually held in prisons and military camps, as well as the headquarters of the National Security Agency and of the Military Intelligence and the Cairo International Airport, and live in cruel and inhuman conditions characterised by overcrowding, lack of hygiene, poor ventilation and inadequate drinking water and food. Some of them are detained only for a few days, others disappear for several weeks or even months. An Amnesty International report<sup>99</sup> estimated an average of three to four cases of enforced disappearance per day in July 2016. According to the NGO, former detainees said they were taken from their

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<sup>99</sup> «Egypt: Hundreds disappeared and tortured amid wave of brutal repression», *Amnesty International*, 13 July 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/egypt-hundreds-disappeared-and-tortured-amid-wave-of-brutal-repression/>, accessed 2 March 2022.



homes overnight or in the early hours of the morning by armed National Security Agency officers without arrest or search warrants and without knowing where they would be taken. Some of their families went to local police stations and prisons but officers denied they were detaining them; others reported their disappearance to the Minister of Justice, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Minister of the Interior, the Prosecutors General and the National Council for Human Rights but received no response. This is why the law considers the relatives of missing persons to be victims of enforced disappearance too: they live in a state of mental anguish and may face serious dangers in the search for their loved ones, facing intimidation, persecution and violence.

The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) expressed concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt and denounced 79 cases of enforced disappearance between May 2014 and May 2015; the Egyptian government only provided a response on six cases, even denying that these were cases of enforced disappearance. From the beginning of its 'Stop Enforced Disappearance' monitoring reports in 2015, ECRF counted 2,723 people disappeared without leaving any trace and pointed out that these have sharply increased since 2013.

#### 4.2.1 Human rights law

These cruel practices are part of a huge system of state repression that gives Egyptian state officers and security officials carte blanche to breach human rights and to do so with impunity. Indeed, they bring to the violation of a wide range of human rights, from the right to the safety and dignity of the person to the right to legal personality and a fair trial, from the right to family life to the right to life as such; moreover, they facilitate the use of torture and other inhuman or degrading treatments against detainees to extract any useful information for criminal trials, as well as to intimidate dissidents and opponents of the government, even leading several victims to confess acts they did not commit. According to the Human Rights Committee, "the disappearance of persons is inseparably linked to treatment that amounts to a violation of Article 7".<sup>100</sup>

Enforced disappearance is prohibited by two *ad hoc* legal instruments in human rights law: the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons.

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<sup>100</sup> See Committee on Civil and Political Rights, *Mojica v. Dominican Republic*, Communication 449/91, Views of 15 July 1994.

The Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance was adopted on 18 December 1992 by General Assembly Resolution 47/133. Its non-binding nature brought to the drafting of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), adopted on 20 December 2006 and entered into force on 23 December 2010. Article 2 gives a clear definition of the term ‘enforced disappearance’ and establishes the three essential elements that characterise such practice:

- a) that there is an arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty;
- b) that such conduct is carried out by officials of the state or by organised groups or private individuals acting on behalf of the state;
- c) that such conduct is followed by a refusal to disclose the fate of the disappeared persons or to acknowledge the deprivation of their liberty, which places such persons outside the protection of the law.

The Inter-American Convention on the Forced Disappearance of Persons (IACFDP), adopted on 9 June 1994 and entered into force on 28 March 1996, considers enforced disappearance as “an affront to the conscience of the Hemisphere” and “a grave and abominable offence against the inherent dignity of the human being” (Preamble).

Even if the DPPED and the IACFDP do not explicitly recognise enforced disappearance as a form of torture, several international and regional bodies, such as the Human Rights Committee or the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, consider it as such.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, cases of enforced disappearance not only constitute cruel acts towards the person deprived of liberty, but are also seen as a breach of the ICCPR with regard to the relatives of the victim, since his/her missing provokes a severe state of anxiety and moral suffering. In ‘Bousroual v. Algeria’ (ICCPR, Communication 992/2001) stated that:

The anguish and stress caused to the author (wife of the victim) by the disappearance of her husband and the continued uncertainty concerning his fate and whereabouts reveal a violation of Article 7 of the Covenant.

Relatives are therefore treated as victims of torture and the ICPPED aims at ensuring that they receive adequate information on the condition of their loved ones (Article 18).

As the prohibition of torture, the prohibition of enforced disappearance is absolute and cannot be restricted under any circumstances, not even in situations of military or political

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<sup>101</sup> See Human Rights Committee, *Mojica v. Dominican Republic*, Communication No. 449/1991; African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, *Liesbeth Zegveld & Mussie Ephrem v. Eritrea*, 250/02.

instability or of suspension of individual guarantees, as stated by Article 1 of both the Conventions. Its implementation is monitored by the Committee on Enforced Disappearance (CED), but also by several treaty bodies and regional tribunals that deal with the prohibition of torture: the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID); the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC); the European Court of Human Rights (ECtRH); the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR); the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). As for the prohibition of torture, these cannot receive individual complaints if the state against which the complaint is made has not ratified the respective Optional Protocol or accepted their jurisdiction.

#### 4.2.2 International criminal law

Article 5 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, as well as the Preamble of the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons, state that the widespread or systematic practice of enforced disappearance against a civilian population constitutes a crime against humanity. Based on the previously mentioned definitions provided by human rights law, the Rome Statute of the ICC has indeed defined enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity in its Article 7(1). As with regard to torture and other ill-treatments, state practice has established the prohibition of enforced disappearance as a norm of customary international law. Such prohibition has therefore become part of *jus cogens* and states might exercise universal jurisdiction over it.

#### 4.2.3 International humanitarian law

Even if the instruments of international humanitarian law do not mention the term 'enforced disappearance', such practice violates a wide range of rules of the law of armed conflict itself, among which, as we have previously analysed, the prohibition of torture.

### 4.3 Obligations and responsibilities in the case of Giulio Regeni

#### 4.3.1 State responsibility in international law

Egypt's international tort liability derives first and foremost from its breach of the obligation to protect, as enshrined in the customary principle on the treatment of foreigners.

According to this principle, Egypt should have taken appropriate measures to prevent and repress offences against the alien's person or property. Secondly, the offence would derive from the violation of the international and regional human rights agreements ratified by Egypt, which expanded the above-mentioned customary rule and aggravated the state's position. The Arab Republic of Egypt has an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights in the territory where it exercises governmental activity according to the following acts:

- the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified on 14 January 1982);
- the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (25 June 1986);
- the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (20 March 1984);
- the Arab Charter on Human Rights (2019).

Even if the Egyptian state has not ratified any of the *ad hoc* legal instruments prohibiting enforced disappearance, such breaches can be addressed by the rules governing the prohibition of torture. Indeed, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance has been formulated on the basis of the UNCAT and obliges states parties to investigate such acts and to prosecute those responsible (Article 3), encourages them to take the necessary measures to hold perpetrators criminally responsible (Article 6), marks the need for relevant provisions under domestic criminal law (Article 4) and for appropriate penalties (Article 7), ensures the right of individuals to report enforced disappearances to the competent authorities (Article 12), pushes for cooperation and mutual legal assistance among states parties (Articles 14, 15). Article 9 of ICPPED establishes universal jurisdiction of the prohibition of this crime.

Besides ensuring to all individuals subject to its jurisdiction the rights granted by the treaties and not interfering with them, the mechanisms prohibiting torture give rise to several positive obligations:

- a) to exercise jurisdiction over acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- b) to enact legislation prohibiting torture and to impartially investigate when there is the possibility of an act of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction;
- c) to adopt adequate sanctions;
- d) to prosecute alleged offenders or extradite them (according to the principle *aut dedere aut judicare*) to a state able and willing to exercise jurisdiction on them;
- e) to ensure redress, right to fair and adequate compensation to the victims or their family members, all of which must be determined by legal authorities;

and to some negative obligations:

- f) to return or extradite individuals to a state where they might face the danger of torture;
- g) to use information obtained from torture.

The consequence of the violation of any rule of international law is international state responsibility, both objective and subjective.

The objective element of an international wrongful act is the breach of a norm of international law by the active or omissive conduct of the state. At the time of writing this work, the trial for the murder of Giulio Regeni has not yet ended: the accused of the kidnapping, torture and murder of the Italian doctoral student are four senior officers of the Egyptian internal secret service, but due to the uncooperative approach of the Egyptian state they have not been judged yet. Therefore, to the current state, there is no official breach of the obligation to refrain from acts of torture and it has not been proved that the Egyptian authorities knew that Regeni might be subject to such violent acts. On the other hand, however, the investigation revealed that Giulio was kept under observation by the Egyptian security forces and it can hence be assumed that they were in a position to prevent such violations. Moreover, on 1 December 2021, the Italian Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry unanimously approved the report on the death of the young Italian researcher, which states that:

The Egyptian failure to disclose the whereabouts of the accused, despite the diplomatic efforts made to achieve it, is nothing more than a mere ‘flight from justice’, which seems to constitute an admission of guilt on the part of a regime that seems to have regarded judicial cooperation as a delaying tactic aimed at restoring the previous level of bilateral relations and certainly not the main way of bringing the murderers to justice.

Regardless of the future outcome of the investigation and of the trial, it is however necessary to recognise that Egypt has certainly failed in its due diligence duty to impartially investigate the case (Article 12 of the CAT) and to collaborate with the Italian government on the search for truth (Article 9 of the CAT), continuing, on the contrary, to prove inefficient and to obstruct the investigation. Several former detainees accuse Egyptian prosecutors not only of not investigating allegations of ill-treatments, but also of helping to cover up periods of enforced disappearance by failing to correct false arrest dates in investigative reports. These cover-ups are due to the lack of independence of the Public Prosecutor’s Office from the Egyptian government, which is responsible for ensuring that all arrests and states of detention guarantee the rights of detainees; prosecutors are indeed appointed on the approval of the

Egyptian President, while the Ministry of Justice has the power to draw up reports on their performance and to take disciplinary measures against them. Finally, Egypt also failed in its duty to introduce or enhance a regulation on the prohibition of torture within its legal system, as required by Article 4 of the CAT.

On the other hand, the subjective element of an international tort is attributed to the intentionality with which torture is inflicted. First of all, according to the CAT, this international tort must be committed by a *de jure* organ (which has the status of an organ under domestic law) or *de facto* organ (which depends on and is controlled by the state itself) whose actions are attributed to the state. The accused, who belong to the Egyptian National Security Agency, would have acted intentionally and with the specific purpose to repress Giulio's research for the PhD in Cambridge. This goes totally against CAT, which even provides rules of conduct and procedures to be followed by enforcement law personnel in order to prevent the crime of torture; Article 10, for instance, states that:

Each State Party shall ensure that education and information regarding the prohibition against torture are fully included in the training of law enforcement personnel, civil or military, medical personnel, public officials and other persons who may be involved in the custody, interrogation or treatment of any individual subjected to any form of arrest, detention or imprisonment.

If the acts of torture turn out to be attributable to private criminal gangs and not to individuals within the Egyptian governmental apparatus, Egypt could anyway be held responsible for failing to prevent, prosecute and repress a possible violation of the prohibition of torture.

A breach of the prohibition of torture by Egypt would also result in a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in particular of Articles 7 and 10(1). Unlike CAT, the Covenant refers not only to pain or suffering caused by public officials acting in official capacities, but also to cases inflicted by people acting "outside their official capacity or in a private capacity."<sup>102</sup>

In addition to these international human rights norms, the prohibition of torture is enshrined in Article 5 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which reads:

Every individual shall have the right to the respect of the dignity inherent in a human being and to the recognition of his legal status. All forms of exploitation and degradation of man

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<sup>102</sup> CCPR General Comment No. 20, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fb0.html>.

particularly slavery, slave trade, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment and treatment shall be prohibited.

Moreover, Article 8 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights states that:

No one shall be subjected to physical or psychological torture or to cruel, degrading, humiliating or inhuman treatment.

Each State party shall protect every individual subject to its jurisdiction from such practices and shall take effective measures to prevent them. The commission of, or participation in, such acts shall be regarded as crimes that are punishable by law and not subject to any statute of limitations. Each State party shall guarantee in its legal system redress for any victim of torture and the right to rehabilitation and compensation.

When a state proves to be internationally responsible due to a breach of international law, it must immediately terminate the violation and provide full reparation. Reparation can take different forms: restitution (where possible), compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. In the case that the request of the injured state is not satisfied, it can resort to countermeasures, which must be temporary, non-forcible and non-punitive and must aim at reinstating the legal order that has been violated, or to retorsions, unfriendly conducts in the framework of the relations between states that are always legitimate; this is the case of a limitation or rupture of diplomatic relations with a state, for instance calling back home an ambassador, or the withdrawal of a voluntary aid program.

#### 4.3.2 State responsibility under Egyptian law

The prohibition of torture in Egyptian law is enshrined in Egypt's Constitution of 2014. The reference norms are Article 51, which reads that "Dignity is a right for every person that may not be infringed upon. The state shall respect, guarantee and protect human dignity" and Article 52 of, which states that "Torture in all forms and types is a crime that is not subject to prescription". The fact that the Egyptian law considers torture as a crime without prescription means that it considers it such a serious crime that there should be no time limit on the right of a victim of torture to bring a criminal case against the alleged perpetrators. Article 55 even specifies that:

All those who are apprehended, detained or have their freedom restricted shall be treated in a way that preserves their dignity. They may not be tortured, terrorised, or coerced. They may not be physically or mentally harmed, or arrested and confined in designated locations that are appropriate according to humanitarian and health standards. [...]

Any violation of the above is a crime and the perpetrator shall be punished under the law.

The accused possesses the right to remain silent. Any statement that is proven to have been given by the detainee under pressure of any of that which is stated above, or the threat of such, shall be considered null and void.

The prohibition of torture is also contained in the Egyptian Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP). Article 126 reads as follows:

Any public official/civil servant or public employee who orders torturing a suspect or does the torturing personally, in order to force him/her to confess, shall be punished with hard labour or imprisonment for a period of three to ten years.

If the tortured victim dies, the penalty as prescribed for deliberate murder shall be inflicted.

Prosecutors also charge perpetrators of ‘use of cruelty’ under Article 129, which reads:

Any public official or employed/civil servant or any person charged with performing a public service who employs cruelty with people, depending on his position, such that he/she commits a breach of their honour, or incurs bodily pains to them, shall be punished with detention for a period not exceeding one year or paying a fine not exceeding two hundred pounds.

Such prohibition is however nowhere near to the international law against torture. These norms do not regulate the offence of complicity when a public official fails to prevent the use of torture by officials or other individuals under his/her authority. Moreover, the penalties prove totally inadequate with respect to the prohibition of torture in international law. This shows the inability of the Egyptian legal system to effectively, independently and impartially examine both allegations of torture and detention conditions.

Although the Egyptian law does not specifically criminalise enforced disappearance, many legal instruments entail regulations that aim at protecting and safeguarding its victims. Article 54 of the Constitution and Article 40 of the CCP condemn unreasonable arrests, prohibit detentions without a judicial order, state that anyone arrested or held in custody must be informed immediately of the reason for the arrest and allowed to contact anyone they consider



appropriate to inform, including a lawyer, and guarantees the right of the detainees to challenge the legality of their detention before a court. Egyptian law also stipulates that all individuals deprived of their liberty must be detained in official places of detention subject to judicial review (Article 56 of the Constitution and Article 41 of the CCP). Nonetheless, Egyptian security forces use to arrest people without an arrest warrant and to falsify arrest dates to hide the time spent in enforced disappearance, and Egyptian authorities do not normally investigate effectively, nor in an independent and impartial manner.

The Egyptian Anti-Terrorism Law No. 94, decreed by President el-Sisi in August 2015, has given a further blow to the safeguard against arbitrary detention and arrest. Under Articles 40 and 41, the authorities have the power to arrest and detain those suspected of committing or about to commit acts of terrorism without judicial safeguards and to detain them without giving them access to their families or lawyers for up to eight days; such authorities must however inform the public prosecutor of the arrest. This article clearly goes against the Egyptian Constitution, which guarantees that anyone arrested can contact family and lawyers (Article 54), and the CCP, which prescribes a penalty of up to three years or a fine for any individual who arbitrarily arrests someone without a judicial order (Article 280). Moreover, the Egyptian criminal justice system has started taking advantage of this law and uses counter-terrorism as an excuse to sentence people who challenge the authorities to long prison terms or even death.

#### **4.4 The response of Italy, the Regeni family and the international community**

##### **4.4.1 Italy as the injured state**

As the injured state, Italy has the right to exert all actions included in the exercise of diplomatic protection: invoking Egypt's responsibility, asking for reparations, resorting to international arbitration, adopting economic countermeasures, disrupting commercial and diplomatic relations and so on. The right for truth represents a first form of reparation: both Italy and the Regeni family must know the truth about the circumstances of the disappearance and the identity of the perpetrators, which obliges the Egyptian state to conduct an effective and impartial investigation on the case. Italy can then ask for compensation for the moral suffering that Giulio's family has undergone and is still undergoing, first due to the loss of their loved one, second because, six years after Giulio's death, the trial is already stalled. Nonetheless, the measures taken by the Italian authorities so far have not led to any significant effect. The temporary recall for consultations of the then Italian ambassador to Cairo Maurizio Massari in

2016 could represent an important act of retorsion, but after only a year current Ambassador Giampaolo Cantini was sent to Cairo to normalise the historical relations between the two countries.

Following either the diplomatic or the judicial path, Italy should position itself as a strong and consistent interlocutor, capable of defending principles and interests other than economic ones and of respecting and enforcing international law.

On 29 June 2016, the Italian Parliament passed the so-called Regeni Amendment, the purpose of which is to block the supply of spare parts for F-16 aircraft from Italy to Egypt. The decree was supposedly intended to spur Egypt to cooperate more adequately in the case, but there are serious doubts that this law had any positive outcome to this end. What is evident is that Italy hesitates to impose harsher economic sanctions on Egypt in light of the good commercial relations it cultivates with the African country and due to the high international political interests involved, such as Egypt's key role in the stability of the Middle East.

From a judicial point of view, it is first necessary to underline that it is improper to evoke the action of international tribunals: first, because the International Criminal Court does not judge individual crimes; second, because Egypt has not ratified the Statute of such Court. Italy might instead resort to Article 30(1) of the CAT, which indicates three different steps to follow for the resolution of the dispute between the two countries:

- a) Italy might attempt to negotiate with Egypt, with the possibility of setting up an *ad hoc* International Commission of Inquiry to shed light on the matter (as indicated by Articles 12 and 20 of the CAT);
- b) if the negotiation is unsuccessful, Italy might move to arbitration, resulting in a binding ruling;
- c) if, after six months from the date of the request for arbitration, Egypt refuses to cooperate, Italy might refer the case to the International Court of Justice, whose ruling is binding and unilateral.

The Rome Public Prosecutor's Office has therefore opened an investigation and, on 14 October 2021, the trial on the death of Giulio Regeni has begun, with the Italian government and the Regeni family as civil plaintiffs. The indictment by the Third Assize Court of Rome of the four Egyptian Secret Services officers accused of kidnapping and aggravate murder has however been suspended, since the Egyptian authorities never provided the alleged prosecutors' home addresses. This means that the judges will have to start again from the preliminary hearing. Nonetheless, even if no one in Egypt is currently under investigation for the death of Giulio Regeni, and even if experts believe that the perpetrators are unlikely to pay since Cairo

and Rome do not share an extradition treaty, the trial seems to have opened a breach of hope and reminded the Egyptian security forces of their responsibilities. However, this is not enough. The Italian government cannot resort only on these judicial measures and ignore the lack of collaboration of the Egyptian state, the absence of independence of the Egyptian judicial system and the massive recourse to torture by its security forces. On the contrary, it must demand and insist that the crimes in question be cleared up, also resorting to more targeted and effective measures in accordance with international law, if it wants to give justice to Giulio Regeni and his family.

#### 4.4.2 The actions of the Regeni family

What about the remedies available for Regeni's family members? In this regard, the international judicial mechanisms are unfortunately not at their disposal. Indeed, Egypt has shown little interest in cooperating for the protection of human rights, since it has neither ratified the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights nor recognised the competence of the Committee against Torture to receive and consider individual complaints. Moreover, Egypt has not even accepted the jurisdiction of the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights. This clearly demonstrates that international protection is missing and that Giulio's family must rely on the Italian domestic system to obtain justice.

Paola Deffendi and Claudio Regeni have therefore declared themselves civil plaintiffs in the trial. Moreover, on 6 January 2021, they filed a complaint against the Italian government for violating Law 185/1990 prohibiting the sale of arms to countries that violate human rights, particularly referring to the sale of the two FREMM frigates to the Egyptian state. They then highlighted that such a law is not respected by any European or non-European nation.

#### 4.4.3 The international community

The reason why the international community has not yet taken legal action is to be found in Cairo's rejection of the Optional Protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to the Convention Against Torture, which give ratifying states the power to complain of a violation of the respective conventions and thus ask the committees to initiate a special investigation. What is certain is that the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) would represent a fundamental step to increase the visibility of violations, provide legal remedies to survivors and

families of victims, deter further abuses and establish accountability systems. This is why, in March 2022, 175 politicians from 13 nations and the European Parliament sent a joint letter to the UNHRC to call for the establishment of a human rights monitoring mechanism in the Egyptian country.<sup>103</sup> International organisations may then impose sanctions, but such a path is not so easy to undertake: any diplomatic measure requires unanimity and many European states have excellent economic ties with Egypt.

On 10 March 2016, the European Parliament passed a non-legislative resolution strongly condemning “the torture and murder under suspicious circumstances of EU citizen Giulio Regeni” and expressing “its deep sympathy and condolences to the family.” The motion, tabled by all groups except Le Pen and Salvini, called on Cairo to provide the Italian authorities with the documents and information needed to advance the investigation and recommended the suspension of military aid to Egypt. Moreover, it stressed that the murder of Giulio Regeni was not an isolated case, but that it took place

within a context of torture, death in custody and enforced disappearances across Egypt in recent years, in clear violation of Article 2 of the EU-Egypt Association Agreement, which states that the relations between the EU and Egypt are to be based on respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights as set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

In a resolution of 18 December 2020 on the deteriorating situation of human rights in Egypt, the European Parliament called for an independent and transparent investigation and for restrictive measures for those responsible for the violation of the prohibition of torture. The resolution:

Deplores the attempt by the Egyptian authorities to mislead and hinder progress in investigating the kidnapping, torture and murder in 2016 of Giulio Regeni, an Italian researcher; regrets the Egyptian authorities’ persistent refusal to provide the Italian authorities with all the documents and information needed to enable a swift, transparent and impartial investigation into the murder of Mr Regeni in accordance with Egypt’s international obligations; calls for the EU and the Member States to urge the Egyptian authorities to fully cooperate with Italian judicial authorities, putting an end to their refusal to send the residence addresses, as required by Italian law, of the four suspects indicated by the Italian prosecutors in Rome, upon closing the investigation, in order to allow for their formal indictment to face charges in a fair trial in Italy;

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<sup>103</sup> Schaer, C., «’Enough is enough’ — UN asked to monitor Egypt human rights», *Deutsche Welle*, 3 February 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/un-asked-to-monitor-egypt-human-rights/a-60649827>, accessed 3 March 2022.

warns the Egyptian authorities against retaliating against the witnesses or the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF) and its lawyers.

It then expressed “strong political and human support” to the Regeni family for their constant search for truth. The situation has however not changed and, during a speech to the Subcommittee on Human Rights in October 2021, Paola and Claudio Regeni asked the European Union and the European Parliament for concrete and effective actions in order to achieve truth and justice.

#### 4.4.4 From individual to collective grief: the role of NGOs

On 29 March 2016, Palazzo Madama, Rome, seat of the Senate of the Republic, hosted a press conference on the case of Giulio Regeni promoted by the President of the Extraordinary Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights of the Senate, Senator Luigi Manconi. The conference was attended by Giulio’s parents, Paola and Claudio, who made their first statements since their son’s murder. The commitment of the Regeni family gave the public opinion a strong message and transformed individual grief into collective grief, making the battle of Giulio’s parents a great battle for human rights and justice and ensuring that the search for truth was not consigned to oblivion. During her intervention in the conference, Giulio’s mother stated:

What happened to Giulio is not an ‘isolated case’, as it has been said by the Egyptian government. Of course, it is an isolated case compared to our history, but compared to the history of other Egyptians and others, it is not.

From that moment, the international community began to fight alongside the Regeni family to raise the voice against the human rights violations that Giulio had to terribly endure. The battle to obtain truth and justice for Giulio Regeni was immediately taken up by the international organisation Amnesty International Italia, which, together with *La Repubblica*, launched the campaign ‘Verità per Giulio Regeni’. The initiative calls for clarity on the Italian researcher’s murder and has gathered numerous endorsements from local authorities, Italian municipalities, universities, civil society associations and individual citizens. #veritàperGiulioRegeni is the hashtag for a race of solidarity and a battle for justice.

Nongovernmental organisations, or NGOs, play a crucial role in protecting and safeguarding human rights, and their work is crucial in offering assistance to victims, gathering information on such violations to make governments face up to their responsibilities, pushing for change in domestic, regional and international laws and raising public awareness of such an important issue. Faced with continued cover-ups and gross human rights violations by the el-Sisi government, Egyptian human rights groups and activists have courageously taken the initiative to denounce and campaign against the use of torture, enforced disappearances and other violations by the public authorities. The Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF) was therefore founded in Cairo in September 2013 and started coordinating campaigns concerning human rights under the el-Sisi government, focusing on themes such as criminal justice, civil liberties, social and economic justice and minorities, and marginalised groups. Among its most important campaigns is the ‘Stop Enforced Disappearance’ campaign, launched on 30 August 2015 in conjunction with the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearance. The campaign aims at mobilising the Egyptian public opinion and the international community to the problem and at prosecuting the perpetrators of the crime, as well as at supporting the victims’ right to obtain compensation and reparation. Despite the hard work and the strong commitment of these associations, pressure on international human rights’ organisations keeps increasing in the Arab country. In August 2014, the Egyptian government obliged NGOs to register under the Law on Associations, which gave it the right to investigate them and reject registration applications for no apparent reason. Investigators visited Egyptian NGOs, such as the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) and the Egyptian Democratic Academy (EDA), and foreign ones, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, looking into their statutes, contracts and budgets, imposing travel bans on staff members and also threatening and arresting them. Many organisations’ offices were raided without any search warrant, others were forced to close or to relocate abroad. On 2 June 2015, Egyptian state authorities imposed a travel ban on the ECRF co-founder and executive director Mohamed Lotfy<sup>104</sup>, who got his passport confiscated as he attempted to fly to Berlin to speak at a roundtable on human rights in Egypt.

On 30 May 2017, President el-Sisi signed Law 70/2017, which introduced new harsh restrictions on NGOs such as the prohibition to conduct field research and investigations without the permission of the Egyptian government. On 19 August 2019, the law was replaced by Law 149/2019, which added further restrictions on the right to freedom of association and

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<sup>104</sup> Front Line Defenders, Case history: Mohamed Lotfy, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/case-history-mohamed-lotfy>.

empowered authorities with additional monitoring and regulating power. This legislation, added to the Anti-Terrorism Law 94/2015, the Terrorist Entities Law 8/2015 and the 2013 Protest Law, gives the authorities broad powers to dissolve organisations and prosecute their members on vague and generic grounds of “threat to national unity” and “disturbance of public order.” This is part of a systematic intimidation process led by the Egyptian government against the work of the civil society.

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An increasing number of states are ratifying treaties prohibiting torture and enforced disappearance and are accepting the jurisdiction of the supervisory mechanisms, trying to give justice to the victims of massive violations and sending perpetrators before international tribunals. Nonetheless, enforcement mechanisms remain relatively weak. Moreover, Italy, as the injured state, and the international community in general have not mobilised themselves sufficiently on the Regeni case. Such cruel practices undermine fundamental values of international and domestic law and cannot remain unnoticed: they require a clear and strong response in the name of Giulio Regeni and of all victims of violent regimes that constantly violate fundamental human rights.





## Conclusion

Six years after Giulio Regeni's death, Egypt is under indictment for serious and ongoing violations of human rights. On the Italian side, the judicial investigations into the death of the researcher, finally concluded by the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office and by the fundamental contribution of the Carabinieri Corpse and the State Police, have directly indicted four members of the Egyptian National Security Agency. And yet, Egypt acquits itself, denying any responsibility and putting on a facade investigation. The beginning of the trial against the four officials on 14 October 2021 was a glimmer of hope in the winding road to truth and justice, but the continuous postponements of the hearings represent an umpteenth mockery by the regime of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

The officials of the Egyptian National Security Agency are constantly abusing their powers to intimidate political opponents and human rights defenders. Arbitrary detentions, episodes of torture and executions are preventing political activists from bringing about change and the civil society from ensuring respect for human rights. Europe's institutions unanimously denounce the Egyptian crimes, yet European states continue to do business with Cairo. The analysis of the diplomatic, economic, commercial and political relations between Italy and Egypt showed that these have not changed at all since the tragic murder in 2016. After the Gentiloni Government decided to reinstate a new Italian Ambassador to Cairo on 11 May 2017, diplomatic relations between the two countries resumed full swing, while trade and investments have even increased significantly – even the arms trade. This contradictory situation ends up legitimising the heinous crimes by authoritarian regimes like the Egyptian one and seems to decree a shameful victory of realpolitik over human rights.

The issue of severing diplomatic relations between the two Mediterranean states is highly debated. There are clear reasons to end relations with the North African partner: it would not only be a denunciation of the Egyptian regime's ongoing abuses and of its unwillingness to cooperate in the investigation, but also a stance supported by Law 185/1990, which expressly forbids the sale of arms to countries at war or violating international human rights conventions. The decision to cut ties with Egypt would certainly bring about huge costs and multiple consequences, but the diplomatic weapons at Italy's disposal are not few and not all so radical. What is certain is that the Egyptian judicial system must immediately put an end to the ongoing violations by opening an effective and impartial investigation on the human rights' situation in

the country. Moreover, the UNHRC should establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism, an important step to increase the visibility of violations, provide legal remedies to survivors and families of victims, deter further abuses and establish accountability systems.

Italian and European institutions have the duty to provide truth and justice not only to Giulio and his family, but also to all students and researchers who, like Giulio did, are opening up to the world to discover it and make it a better place.

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