

ITALY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN



PRIORITIES AND PERSPECTIVES OF A EUROPEAN MIDDLE-POWER

by Silvia Colombo and Anja Palm

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*Solidarity has clearly been downgraded
to a secondary objective, and is now
outweighed by security concerns.*

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SILVIA COLOMBO AND ANJA PALM¹

Italy has long looked at the Mediterranean not only as a mere determinant of its geographical location but as the main source of opportunities and challenges for its domestic and foreign policy actions. The historical inter-linkages that have shaped Italy's preferential relations with the territories and peoples of the so-called Mediterranean region are so numerous that what we see today is just the end point of a very long history. Today the Mediterranean remains a fundamental point of reference and a driver for Italy's foreign policy projection as well as for the making of its domestic politics. Nowhere is this more evident than in the profound links that exist today more than ever between the Italian perspectives on migration flows across the Mediterranean, on the one hand, and the approach developed to address them both in foreign and domestic policy, on the other.

At such a critical juncture, this report takes up the task of addressing the broad topic of 'Italy in the Mediterranean' in order to shed light on the drivers, priorities and concrete actions Italy has pursued regarding the Mediterranean in the period 2016-2018. This timeframe is particularly interesting as it allows continuities and changes to be highlighted within a realm that has traditionally undergone very little variation, irrespective of the specific configuration of political forces in power in the country. Despite many continuities, it is argued here that a combination of factors (ranging from domestic politics – including the new Italian government that took office in June 2018, which is only partially treated here due to the close vicinity of the events – to the geopolitical changes that have been taking place in the wider Mediterranean since the beginning of the century) as well as the dynamics connected to the partial unravelling of the European Union (EU)'s integration process and the lack of cohesion and solidarity among EU member states on specific issues, particularly migration, have been responsible for some important changes that have come about in Italy's Mediterranean approaches.

Before analysing the reasons for these changes, it is important to frame 'the Mediterranean', as this term is applied – sometimes quite arbitrarily – to a vast region stretching from Morocco to Syria, and from the Balkans to Turkey. Historically, the Mediterranean Sea has

been viewed as one of the most important maritime spaces on Earth given the historical events that have happened on its coasts and the exchanges that have taken place on its waters. Whether from a cultural, political or economic point of view, it is not possible to downplay the strategic importance of this enclosed sea and the extent to which it has influenced the development of the civilisations that have risen and declined on its coasts over the centuries. In addition to its historical salience, the Mediterranean Sea is today strategically important from a geopolitical point of view, being a point of passage for trade and human mobility and spanning a relatively small surface that is nevertheless rich in relations, conflicts and cooperation.

Conceptually, framing the Mediterranean means referring to the European viewpoint, as this has traditionally been the main angle from which the area south of Europe has been defined. An important part in the definition of the Mediterranean as a strategic space stems from the fact that it has occupied a prominent role in the construction and integration process of the EU, on the one hand, and has represented an equally important role in the EU's external action, on the other. In other words, as seen from the European perspective, the concept of the Mediterranean has theoretically and politically developed in a dialectic relationship, with the birth and evolution of the idea of a common economic and political space on the northern coast, which is separated from the southern area by the Mediterranean Sea. This self-identification process, which lies at the foundation of the EU construction, is not underpinned by geographical features only but by other fairly common dimensions that separate 'us' from 'them' (democracy vs authoritarianism, economic development vs economic underdevelopment, the private vs public role of religion, peace vs conflicts) and that have subsequently been enshrined in the EU integration process and documents.²

The fact that both regions in the north and the south of the Mediterranean Sea are currently experiencing deep internal crises that show some elements of commonality does not diminish the importance of this geopolitical space and the EU's thrust and resolution to project its influence over the so-called Mediterranean region. On the one hand, the EU integration process is incomplete and shows many cracks, being under pressure from centrifugal tendencies and

¹ Silvia Colombo, Head of the Mediterranean and Middle East Programme at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), has written Part One; Anja Palm, Researcher in the Europe and Mediterranean and Middle East Programmes at the IAI, has written Part Two of this report.

² I. B. Neumann and J. M. Welsh, "The Other in European Self-Definition: An Addendum to the Literature on International Society", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1991, pp. 327-348.

the rise of populist politics that depicts the (southern) Mediterranean region and its people as a source of instability and security threats. On the other hand, the area south of the Mediterranean has undergone a series of shocks and changes that have partially transformed our perception of the region itself, namely a more fragmented region, and of Europe's opportunities for cooperation with it.

This reference to the place of the Mediterranean in the EU's construction does not represent a deviation from the topic of this report since the analysis of Italy's Mediterranean drivers, priorities and actions will be framed in the context of the EU's projection towards this region. Occasionally, our report will also assess and weigh Italy's postures against the behaviour of other member states. This is the case, for example, when no united or coherent EU policies or stances exist in specific domains. Framing 'Italy in the Mediterranean' against the backdrop of the EU's approaches and policies as a whole helps clarify the extent to which Italy is behaving as a 'middle power.' In this regard, two research questions guide this report. The first concerns the autonomous vs EU-driven nature of Italy's actions regarding the Mediterranean. This is not seen as a dichotomy, and this report will attempt to assess the extent to which Italy's multitude of Mediterranean policies are based on an 'integrated approach' that tries to strike a balance between the country's European identity and commitment, on the one hand, and its autonomy in addressing the key challenges and opportunities stemming from the Mediterranean area, on the other. The key areas in which Italy has walked this tightrope during 2016-2018 are the management of regional conflicts and crises (Libya first and foremost); the country's participation in international stabilisation and peace-keeping missions in the framework of international organisations, and Italy's role within multilateral forums such as the EU, UN, NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); and economic and energy diplomacy – not to mention the ever growing importance of external migration policies.

The second research question tackles the relationship that exists within Italy's policymaking between foreign policy imperatives and outputs broadly speaking, on the one hand, and the management of migration that has increasingly become a very salient issue from the domestic political point of view, on the other. This question is also

linked to the broader debate about the reconfiguration of foreign policy preferences under the greater weight that tends to be attributed to migration-related issues compared to other areas (trade, development, cultural diplomacy) at the EU level. To offer a concrete example that will be further developed in this report with regard to the specific case of Libya, an approach that prioritises stemming flows mainly through migration management measures in transit countries might be effective in reducing irregular entries, but it potentially has counterproductive effects on local development and stability. Assessing the changing dynamics in the relationship between migration policies and foreign policy is interesting from an additional perspective, namely the

extent to which the geographical scope of the Mediterranean as previously defined has been subject to change depending on whether we are referring to Italy's foreign policies regarding the Mediterranean broadly speaking or to the country's actions for the management of migration. In the second case, when referring to the Mediterranean region, Italy looks at a space that is defined by the countries of origin and transit of migratory flows reaching its shores. This regional focus excludes areas such as Turkey and the broader Middle East, but encompasses Sahel countries because of their key role as transit countries.

This report is divided into two parts that are analytically independent but conceptually linked. The first addresses Italy's role in the Mediterranean from the foreign policy perspective and tries to provide an answer to the first research question because it depicts Italy's actions regarding the wider Mediterranean as increasingly autonomous but still anchored to the EU's multilateral Euro-Mediterranean framework. The second part discusses Italian (and European) migration policies in the Mediterranean. Linked to the increase in arrivals since 2014, both the centre-left governments (led by prime ministers Matteo Renzi and Paolo Gentiloni) and the new Five Star Movement-League government have launched a number of initiatives partially strengthening previous policies, and thus also contributing to the pre-eminence of migration management over other foreign policy imperatives (the second research question). This trend is linked to Italy's attempts to reshape its presence, role and commitment in the area so as to better meet its strategic priorities (increasingly influenced by domestic concerns) while promoting a more responsible use of the available resources.



The Mediterranean has occupied a prominent role in the construction and integration process of the EU.



PART ONE

ITALY'S ROLE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BETWEEN NATIONAL INTERESTS AND MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

1.1 ITALY'S TRADITIONAL AND CHANGING ROLE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

1.1.1 *The partial re-orientation of Italy's Mediterranean policies towards North Africa, the Sahel and Africa*

Geographically speaking, Italy is undoubtedly a Mediterranean country. Historically, the country has translated this fact into one of the bases of its external projection. Since the end of the second world war, a great degree of continuity has characterised Italy's orientation in terms of the pillars of its foreign policy. The traditional axes along which Italy's foreign projection and actions have taken place are a) a strong anchoring to the EU's integration project, b) preferential relations with the USA, and c) a constantly renewed perception of the strategic nature of the Mediterranean area for its balanced development. A metaphor has been developed to describe this approach and it features three circles corresponding to the main pillars of Italy's foreign policy, ie, Europeanism, Atlanticism and Mediterraneanism, and reference is commonly made to this metaphor even in official speeches.³

The strong resilience of Italy's Mediterranean orientation in spite of turbulent domestic politics and changes of government is even more remarkable in light of the volatility of the area itself, politically and security-wise. The fact that Italy's identity is to a large extent defined by its geographical location in the Mediterranean has not only influenced its role and relations in this area but has also been the most important lens through which Italy's foreign policy in general has been articulated. The country's Mediterranean anchoring has influenced the other two dimensions (ie, Europeanism and Atlanticism) in both the way in which Italy has been perceived by the USA and the other EU member states, and in its own self-perception. Since the end of the cold war, Italy has had "to take on greater responsibilities in dealing with the increased challenges to international security" with a special focus on its immediate Mediterranean neighbourhood. Italy has indeed often been called upon by Washington to contribute

its share of the burden when it comes to Libya, Tunisia or Lebanon.⁴ Over the last decade, Italy's Mediterranean orientation has become even more significant with Rome attempting to maintain a fairly solid presence at the European level, trying to exploit the capital (and very often withstand the challenges) derived from it by its geopolitical stances. In so doing, Italy has traditionally made an attempt to turn its Mediterranean identity and policies into a tool to reinforce its role within Europe and across the Atlantic.⁵

In light of this continuity and despite the significant changes in Italy's domestic political landscape unleashed by the latest round of parliamentary elections at the beginning of March 2018, it is important to assess the scope and implications of what can be described as a partial re-orientation of Italy's Mediterranean focus by examining the specific role Italy played in the region between 2016 and 2018.⁶ During this period, it is clear that Italy attempted to capitalise on its identity as a European Mediterranean country to boost its reputation and role in this strategic region, as well as its standing within the EU countries' fold. This analysis will also include some references to the latest government that took office in June 2018.

An assessment of Italy's bilateral relations with the countries of the Mediterranean and the broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region shows the extent to which Italy's Mediterranean policy underwent a transformation between 2016 and 2018, leading to a greater diversification of the areas of interest and intervention, away from the predominant Middle Eastern region. By acknowledging the porousness of the Mediterranean to dynamics taking place in the neighbouring Sahel – a region where internal and regional dynamics of conflict have been exacerbated in the past five years due to the spread of violent extremism associated with state instability – and in the African continent as a whole, Italy's foreign policy has started to be increasingly reoriented towards these areas. North Africa (Libya and Tunisia in particular) and the Sahel (the case of Niger is particularly prominent in this respect) have thus emerged as the main hotspots of Italy's foreign policy action, which has been driven in particular by national security

3 See, for example, the speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Angelino Alfano, at the conference "A 70 anni dalle elezioni del 1948", 18 April 2018, https://www.agenzianova.com/a/5ad78685d23fe5_80861736/1892682/2018-04-18/italia-ministro-alfano-atlantismo-europa-e-mediterraneo-pilastr-della-politica-estera-italiana.

4 M. Carbone, "Introduction: Italy's foreign policy and the Mediterranean", *Modern Italy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, May 2008, p. 111. See also L. Marchi, R. Whitman and G. Edwards (eds.), *Italy's foreign policy in the Twenty-first Century: A contested nature?*, Routledge, Basingstoke, UK, 2015.

5 R. Del Sarto and N. Tocci, "Italy's politics without policy: Balancing Atlanticism and Europeanism in the Middle East", *Modern Italy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, May 2008, pp. 135-153.

6 R. Cattaneo, "Dopo elezioni: se instabilità incide su politica estera italiana", *AffarInternazionali*, 11 March 2018, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/2018/03/elezioni-instabilita-politica-estera/>.

considerations linked to the spike in rhetoric and perceptions around the migration issue.⁷ Accordingly, the Italian presence in the wider Middle East (especially in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan, where Rome had traditionally taken an active part in military and civilian missions) has been gradually but steadily downgraded.

One of the traditional functions of these missions has been that of cultivating privileged relations both with the governments of the countries in which the civilian and military missions take place and with Italy's European, transatlantic and NATO partners. Indeed, these missions have been heavily affected by this partial re-orientation of Italy's foreign policy. There has thus been a general increase in the funds aimed at operations in Africa – with particular attention to the Sahel region – from 9% in 2017 to 16% in 2018, compared to the cost of operations on the Asian continent (down from 58% to 51%) and in the Middle East in particular.⁸ This military and political transition to the southern flank was made possible thanks to the success of the international anti-ISIS campaign in Iraq. Although incomplete, this major achievement against the terrorist group gave Italy the chance to announce a gradual reduction of its military presence in Iraq (in the context of the same anti-ISIS coalition where Italian soldiers had constituted the second largest western contingent after the USA) and in the NATO mission in Afghanistan.⁹ An exception to this trend, however, is represented by the fact that Italy has renewed its commitment to the NATO mission in Lebanon, UNIFIL or Leonte as it is called in Italy.¹⁰ This is in continuity with the past and constitutes an important instrument for enhancing Italy's alliances in a critical area for Italian interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, which has recently also been linked

to energy assets and markets. With 1,100 soldiers, 270 tanks and 6 warplanes, UNIFIL is so far the longest military mission in which Italy has been involved.¹¹ The first troops reached Lebanon in 1982 within the US Multinational Force (MNF) but the mission then expanded and evolved after the Israel-Hezbollah confrontation escalated in 2006. Since summer 2018 the mission has once again been under the leadership of an Italian major general.¹²

Alongside this, at the end of December 2017, a new military mission to Niger was agreed before then being put on hold at the request of Niger's local authorities.¹³ The initial mandate of the mission included the training of local forces, and counter-terrorism and anti-human trafficking operations. However, the destiny of the mission is now unknown as rumours of its stall have emerged after Niger's interior minister warned against such an extensive presence (around 480 men by the end of 2018). So far only sanitary items have been distributed, although the Italian defence ministry claims the mission is ongoing¹⁴ and has already deployed some military personnel (53 men).¹⁵ Moreover, in 2018 the size of the Italian contingent in Libya surged – Italian soldiers are present around Misurata and in the port of Tripoli to train the Libyan “coast-guard” (LCG) – following a request from the local government. An increase in the number of soldiers stationed in Tunisia under the NATO command to oversee training and capacity-building operations had also been originally planned at the beginning of 2018 but this was put on hold by the new Italian government that took office in June 2018. In addition to the migration-related missions to which Italy has made an important contribution in past years¹⁶, Italy also participates in the other European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions in the

7 Italy's migration-related stances and policies are assessed in the second part of this report.

8 Camera dei Deputati, *Autorizzazione e proroga missioni internazionali 2018 (DOC CCL n. 3 e DOC CCL bis 1)*, 12 January 2018, <http://www.camera.it/temiap/d/leg17/D10660>.

9 G. Di Feo, “Pinotti: ‘Via dall'Iraq metà dei soldati. E l'Italia in Africa rafforza l'impegno’”, in *Repubblica*, 17 December 2017, https://www.difesa.it/IL_Ministro/Interviste/Pagine/17_12_2017_Repubblica_intervista.aspx.

10 This is also partially linked to Italy's staunch support for the Christian minorities' rights in the Middle East and the role this dossier plays in directing its foreign policy. See A. Alfano, “Tra Italia e Santa Sede visione comune. Da alimentare”, *Avvenire*, 14 February 2017, <https://www.avvenire.it/opinioni/pagine/comune-visione-da-alimentare-sempre>; Ministero degli Esteri, *Azione dell'Italia a tutela della libertà di religione o credo*, 21 December 2017, <https://www.esteri.it/mae/tiny/26013>; Ministero degli Esteri, *Conferenza stampa di lancio della “Conferenza sulla responsabilità degli stati, delle istituzioni e degli individui nella lotta all'anti-semitismo nell'area Osce”*, 26 January 2018, https://www.esteri.it/mae/it/sala_stampa/archivio-notizie/eventi/2018/01/conferenza-sulla-responsabilita.html.

11 See the Defence Department website, *Unifil: Contributo nazionale*, https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/UNIFIL/Pagine/ContributoNazionale.aspx.

12 See <https://unifil.unmissions.org/mission-leadership>.

13 A. Carli, “Niger, missione in stallo ma il Governo va verso la conferma”, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 10 August 2018, http://www.ilssole24ore.com/art/notizie/2018-08-09/niger-missione-stallo-ma-governo-va-la-conferma-094422.shtml?uuid=AErOFFZF&refresh_ce=1.

14 Stato Maggiore della Difesa, *Forze Armate: Continua la missione in Niger*, 6 April 2018, https://www.difesa.it/SMD_/Comunicati/Pagine/Forze_Armate_continua_missione_militare_in_Niger.aspx.

15 Ministero della Difesa, *Operazioni in corso*, consulted on 11 September 2018, https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/Documents/Mappa_Operazioni_Militari_IT_ultima.pdf.

16 These missions are assessed in the second part of this report.

area, namely the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) Libya and the capacity-building EUCAP Sahel Niger.¹⁷

1.1.2 *The EU's Euro-Mediterranean frameworks of cooperation and the role of Italy*

Before examining the Italian Mediterranean relations and policies further, it is important to contextualise them by looking at the construction and development of the Euro-Mediterranean frameworks of cooperation since the mid-1990s. As already argued, the southern and eastern Mediterranean region has over time become an important object in the external projection of the EU, which has built an important part of its foreign policy around this concept – particularly its discourse on the promotion of democracy and human rights. This is assessed in the literature that describes the EU as a normative actor, namely a force for good that promotes the same values and principles of democracy, peace and respect for human rights upon which it is itself based.¹⁸ The depiction of the EU as a normative foreign policy actor – despite its major flaws – brings with it important implications in the way in which foreign policy relations are articulated, given the contraposition between interests and values.

Another dichotomy upon which relations between the northern and the southern/eastern shores of the Mediterranean have developed since the outset is between the bilateral vs the multilateral track. While the bilateral track includes both the national policies developed by the EU member states and those carried out by the EU as a whole in collaboration with or for the benefit of specific countries in the area, the multilateral track refers to all the cooperation frameworks that, since the mid-1990s, have attempted to promote an agenda focused on the construction of a shared Mediterranean space through the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, the fostering of trade opportunities and economic integration, and dialogue at the level of societies – thus setting the scene for a truly inclusive exchange in and around the Mediterranean.

In this regard, three pillars – political, economic and social – formed the architecture of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of 1995 followed by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2003-2004. With this initiative, addressed both to the east (Eastern Neighbourhood) and to the south (Southern Neighbourhood), the Mediterranean has often been identified with the concept of 'neighbourhood', largely promoting a narrow-minded vision of this extremely complex and heterogeneous area. Framing the southern and eastern Mediterranean region as the European Neighbourhood has also led to a biased selection of the dossiers that stand at the core of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, and to great emphasis being placed on those of greatest interest to the EU and its member states but not necessarily to the southern Mediterranean partners. The concept of bias refers here to the eurocentric vision of the Mediterranean region the EU has constantly fostered. Theoretically, this is linked to the EU's posture as a normative foreign policy actor mentioned above. The result has been a growing securitisation of the EU's approach to the Mediterranean that has also been consolidating from the turn of the century in response to some specific developments that the EU has not been able to address and manage adequately (namely, the spread of violent extremism and terrorism, the emergence of political Islam actors in key government positions in the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, and increased migration flows and their impact on Europe's internal dynamics).¹⁹

In addition to the biased EU agenda towards the region, which has not contributed to the construction of a shared or comprehensive set of Mediterranean policies, the lack of a region-oriented perspective in the southern and eastern Mediterranean area itself can be highlighted as one of the main stumbling blocks of the EU's multilateral engagement towards the Mediterranean. In other words, the so-called 'other shore of the Mediterranean' has never represented a unitary region. While regionalisation has certainly been at play, the process of regional integration has not (yet) taken off and nothing even remotely similar to the EU exists. This can clearly be seen when assessing the area extending from Morocco to the Arabian peninsula through the lenses of the literature on regionalism. This concept is understood as "a policy or project whereby states and non-state actors cooperate

17 A. Marrone and P. Sartori, "La riforma della Difesa, le missioni di pace e il lancio della Pesca", *L'Italia al bivio. Rapporto sulla politica estera italiana*, Edizione 2018, Rome, Nuova Cultura, July 2018, pp. 81-91, http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiq_19.pdf.

18 See E. Barbé and E. Johansson-Nogués (2008), "The EU as a modest 'force for good': the European Neighbourhood Policy", *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 1, pp. 81-96 and N. Tocci (ed.) (2008), *Who is a Normative Foreign Policy Actor? The European Union and its Global Partners*, Brussels, Centre for European Policy Studies.

19 M. Cebece and T. Schumacher, *The EU's Constructions of the Mediterranean (2003-2017)*, MedReset Working Papers, April 2017, http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/medreset_wp_3.pdf.



The EU integration process is incomplete and shows many cracks, being under pressure from centrifugal tendencies and the rise of populist politics that depicts the (southern) Mediterranean region and its people as a source of instability and security threats.



and coordinate strategy within a given region".²⁰

From this point of view, even in the presence of some regional (the League of the Arab States) or sub-regional (the Gulf Cooperation Council) organisations, it is very difficult to talk about a region in the area in question. Also from the geopolitical point of view, the southern and eastern Mediterranean with the addition of the Arabian peninsula, which was traditionally excluded from the conceptualisation and policies related to the EU Neighbourhood, represent at least three distinct sub-regions with strong and deep interconnections with the neighbouring areas (the Sahel and Africa for North Africa; Turkey and Central Asia for the Middle East; Central Asia, the Horn of Africa and the Indian sub-continent as far as the Arabian peninsula is concerned).²¹

Alongside this view, a different perspective has emerged within the so-called 'critical regionalism' literature – a line of research that, starting from the constructivist and above all the post-structuralist perspective, criticises the teleological and unidirectional approach of mainstream regionalism. According to authors such as Silvia Ferabolli, there is a link between Arab nationalism and the experiences, not necessarily unsuccessful, of regionalisation in the area that corresponds – as we have seen from a purely eurocentric point of view – to the southern and eastern Mediterranean.²² According to this line of research, immaterial factors and ideological and political identities (which have by now disappeared) are at the basis of the de facto existence of a region, whereas most observers see divisions, conflicts and challenges to cooperation.

Leaving aside the discussion about EU policies towards the Mediterranean and the state of (sub-) regional integration, it is nevertheless important to question the idea of the Mediterranean as Europe's neighbourhood. This idea emerges strongly from the cooperation frameworks and policies so far promoted by the EU. In

other words, it is important to move away from a parochial and restrictive view of the Mediterranean and

instead frame it as a 'global Mediterranean', namely a geopolitical space that has long been porous and open to influence from a multiplicity of regional and global players.²³ Consider, for example, the renewed role of Russia in the (eastern) Mediterranean, the foreign policy activism of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries or the economic interests of China in the region (from Greece to North Africa and with the Horn of Africa as the gate to the entire African continent). It is not a contradiction to talk about the Mediterranean by conceptualising and acting on it as a much wider geopolitical space.

Against this backdrop, the EU Global Strategy, launched in June 2016, has taken a big step forward in laying the groundwork for the implementation of EU-wide foreign and security policy actions that are as comprehensive and inclusive as possible as far as the contents, instruments, targets, concrete policies and, finally, partnerships are concerned. While there is still a long way to go to turn this new course of the EU's foreign policy into reality, a serious assessment of the pitfalls stemming from conceptualising the Mediterranean as a 'neighbourhood' has been ongoing, particularly since the start of the Arab uprisings and the significant changes that have taken place in the geopolitics of the region. The acknowledgement of the limitations of previous frameworks of cooperation led, for example, to the revision of the ENP in 2011 and then again in 2015, while the bureaucratic inertia that inhabits much of the work of the EU institutions has prevented the much-needed overhaul of the very concept of 'neighbourhood' as applied to the Mediterranean. In the implementation of the EU Global Strategy, greater attention is given to the attainment of state and societal resilience both internally and externally. This is the EU's new guiding long-term goal in the context of the enormous challenges the EU faces in the wider Mediterranean region and of the limited resources it has at its disposal. This appears a more pragmatic

20 L. Fawcett and A. Hurrell, eds., *Regionalism and World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 24.

21 S. Colombo, "The Gulf and the EU: Partners or Competitors?" in S. Gstöhl and E. Lannon (eds.), *The Neighbours of the European Union's Neighbours. Diplomatic and Geopolitical Dimensions beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy*, Farnham and Burlington, Ashgate, 2014, pp. 123-144.

22 S. Ferabolli, *Arab Regionalism: A Post-Structural Perspective*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics, 2015.

23 S. Colombo, "The Trajectory of the Crises in the Mediterranean" in A. Marrone and M. Nones, *Italy and Security in the Mediterranean*, IAI Research Papers, 2016, pp. 11-23.

and realistic approach than any of the grand schemes of Euro-Mediterranean, neighbourhood-centred cooperation so far adopted.²⁴

Italy's position in the framework of the broader Mediterranean policies of the EU has always been ambivalent. On the one hand, Italy has tried to strengthen the southern dimension of the EU's external policy and to promote the cause of the Mediterranean as a key area for the security and development of Europe, as well as its own important contribution and clout to secure them. On the other, it has at the same time been cautious in implementing policies that could directly endanger its often short-term national interests. For example, while promoting trade relations with the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, Italy has always been very reluctant to extend any trade privileges to exports from these countries as it has feared this could hurt its interests and privileges, particularly in the agricultural sector. The same now applies mutatis mutandis to today's migration and refugee issues – as duly documented in the second part of this report.²⁵ Indeed Italy's foreign policies towards Persian Gulf countries, Turkey, Israel, Libya and Egypt confirm this pattern of ambiguity in the name of Realpolitik.

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The strong resilience of Italy's Mediterranean orientation in spite of turbulent domestic politics and changes of government is even more remarkable in light of the volatility of the area itself, politically and security-wise.

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1.2 ITALY'S TOOLKIT AND PARTNERSHIPS IN THE REGION: THE TENSION BETWEEN MULTILATERAL AND BILATERAL INSTRUMENTS

1.2.1 *The consolidation of important economic links as a foreign policy tool*

Apart from the military and civilian presence in the conflict-torn countries of North Africa and the Sahel discussed in the previous section, Italy's Mediterranean policies have on the one hand focused

on strengthening ties with countries that occupy a key position in Italian trade, energy, and security cooperation patterns. On the other, however, the lion's share of Italy's engagement with the countries in the region has taken place first and foremost in relation to migration, which has arguably become the most important foreign policy issue (with regard both to the EU and to Italy's Mediterranean partner

countries) with significant ramifications for national politics as well.²⁶ Looking at the first trend more closely, a key aspect of Italian foreign policy towards its southern Mediterranean partners has been the consolidation of existing economic links. Economic interests and relations have generally prevailed over other political and/or ideological considerations and this is clear in relation to some case studies in the wider Mediterranean. The need to reaffirm and in certain cases intensify these relations has emerged as a way not to lose ground in the face of competition from other European member states (eg, France).

24 *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy*, June 2016, https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/regions/files/eugs_review_web_o.pdf.

25 M. Carbone, "Between ambition and ambivalence: Italy and the European Union's Mediterranean policy", *Modern Italy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, May 2008, pp. 155-168.

26 A. Dessì and F. Olmastroni, "Foreign posture in comparative perspective: a quantitative and qualitative appraisal of Italian foreign and defence policy during the Renzi Government", *Contemporary Italian Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2017, pp. 201-218.

This has resulted in a major effort to boost economic, commercial and energy-related interests while promoting cultural exchanges and bilateral cooperation on trade, technology and the development of renewable energy and relevant infrastructure. Furthermore, special attention has been drawn to the interests of the military industry.

In 2016 Italy's export of military material grew by 85.7% compared to the previous year, thanks to new and important contracts with the countries in the Persian Gulf.²⁷ This geopolitical area has in its own right become part and parcel of Italy's foreign policy projection towards the wider Mediterranean due to the important and lucrative relations Rome has been able to cultivate with these countries. To link this to the previous discussion of the concept of the Mediterranean having 'exploded', the emergence of the Persian Gulf has not only a conceptual and theoretical significance and underpinning, but is also very much linked to pragmatic considerations. From the point of view of Italian policymaking, relations with the countries of the Arabian peninsula are dealt with as part of the same basket. Indeed, bilateral links between Italy and the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar) are primarily based on a web of commercial and economic exchanges and contracts. The constant expansion of these relations has mainly been spurred by the military sector. Furthermore, the Persian Gulf countries have emerged as a fertile ground for Italian investments not just because the monarchies in these countries are trying to diversify their economies in the context of the much advertised Visions that each of these countries in the region has drafted and that are often implemented with the advice and cooperation of foreign stakeholders, but also because there are some major events that are to take place in the area, like Expo 2020 Dubai or the 2022 Football World Cup in Qatar. Given this growing involvement in the Persian Gulf, Rome risked finding itself between a rock and a hard place when in 2017 a

rift pitted Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE (and Egypt – the so-called Quartet) against Qatar.²⁸ However, the feud and lack of sub-regional cohesion in the Arabian peninsula do not yet seem to have endangered Italian economic interests. Instead, in the second half of 2017, both Italy's Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Angelino Alfano toured the region to negotiate a number of cooperation agreements. Among them, the sale of seven warships to Qatar should be highlighted, as the contract with Fincantieri worth €5 billion stands out as concrete evidence of the importance of military contracts and commercial exchanges in the relations between Italy and the Persian Gulf.²⁹

In addition to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates as strategic commercial partners, Italy's relations with countries such as Egypt, Israel, Libya and Turkey stand out as particularly pivotal with regard to Italy's role and projection in the Mediterranean.³⁰ Starting with Israel, Tel Aviv and Rome mostly share economic, military and commercial interests, as they did in the past. In particular, the perspective of a joint initiative to tap into the reserves of the eastern Mediterranean gas reservoirs (with a view to using energy diplomacy as a tool for making the area more stable) has created new spaces for synergies and cooperation between the two countries, as well as with Greece and Cyprus. In December 2017, the four countries signed a memorandum of understanding endorsing the construction of EastMed, a gas pipeline that is expected to carry 9-12 billion cubic metres of gas annually by 2025. The project, which would ease the dependency of Italy and other European countries on Russian gas, is currently awaiting a final decision at EU level.³¹ According to Francesco Maria Talò, former Italian ambassador to Tel Aviv, Italian enterprises "can benefit from being present in a relatively small country with such an extraordinary international projection".³² However, it can be argued that until very recently Italy did not capitalise on this special

27 Governo, *Relazione sulle operazioni autorizzate e svolte per il controllo dell'esportazione, importazione e transito dei materiali di armamento, riferita all'anno 2016*, 18 April 2017, <http://www.senato.it/leg/17/BGT/Schede/docnonleg/34275.htm>; A. Negri, "Boom di export delle armi italiane grazie alle monarchie del Golfo", *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 27 April 2017, <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2017-04-27/boom-export-armi-italia85-eurofighter-kuwait-100300.shtml>.

28 M. Szalai, *The Crisis of the GCC and the Role of the European Union*, MENARA Future Note No. 14, September 2018, http://www.menaraproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/menara_fn_14.pdf.

29 "Qatar e Italia: accordo militare congiunto", *Sicurezza internazionale*, 2 August 2017, <http://sicurezzainternazionale.luiss.it/?p=19120>; "Le marine di Italia e Qatar firmano tre accordi tecnici", *Analisi Difesa*, 2 March 2017, <http://www.analisedifesa.it/?p=105554>.

30 Italy's Libya policies and its relations to Egypt are analysed in the following sections.

31 A. Rettman, "EU states and Israel sign gas pipeline deal", *Euobserver*, 6 December 2017, <https://euobserver.com/energy/140183> and R. Bousso, "Israel expects decision on East Med gas pipeline to Europe in 2019", *Reuters*, 8 March 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-ceraweek-energy-israel/israel-expects-decision-on-east-med-gas-pipeline-to-europe-in-2019-idUKKCN1GK2OI>.

32 Interview with Talò in *Diplomazia economica italiana*, a. 11, n. 1/17, 21 February 2017, pp. 10-11, https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/pubblicazioni/2017/02/newsletter_n.1_21_febbraio_2017.pdf. In the last ten years, the trade between the two countries has undergone an average growth of 4% a year and Italy is Israel's third largest trading partner.

and longstanding relationship with Israel to put pressure on the government in Tel Aviv to improve the prospects of reaching sustainable peace with the Palestinians. Nevertheless, in December 2017, with yet another deterioration of these prospects following the decision of US President Donald Trump to move the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, Italy did take a clear stance, formally rejecting the move, in its position as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and within the UN General Assembly.³³

In a similar way, important economic interests lie at the heart of Italy-Turkey relations. A positive trend in the bilateral economic relations was recorded in 2017 despite the significant deterioration of the political, societal and human rights situation in Turkey. During that year, Italy consolidated its position as Turkey's third largest trading partner, with a trade volume of about €18 billion and a presence on the territory of 1,300 enterprises.³⁴ In contrast, the Italy-Turkey political dialogue settled on a less warm note especially after Gabriele Del Grande, an Italian journalist and blogger, was arrested at the border with Syria in the province of Hatay.³⁵ The diplomatic tension around the call for Del Grande's release compounded Italy's concerns, discreetly expressed, about the illiberal turn taken by the Turkish political establishment.³⁶ Yet this muffled dissent was a far cry from the frictions that in the same timeframe characterised relations between Ankara and other European countries, such as Germany or the Netherlands, which host a far greater number of citizens of Turkish origin.

All in all, Italy's Mediterranean policies between 2016 and 2018 underwent a partial re-orientation while remaining anchored to the traditional approach that puts a premium on economic and security-related cooperation with regard to the broader Mediterranean. This partial re-orientation concerned the growing importance of North

Africa, the Sahel and Africa as a whole as the preferred terrains for action as well as the expansion of economic links to the Persian Gulf region. These are also likely to remain Italian priorities in the years to come.

It is hard to make any accurate prediction, however, given how complex and volatile the regional chessboard has become. Any future-oriented prospects should take into account how the EU as a whole, as well as the European member states and important players such as the USA position themselves and perceive Italy's involvement in this area. On the one hand, President Trump's foreign policy choices in 2017-2018 have contributed to opening a serious rift between the transatlantic partners. Despite differences among the EU member states, which can be explained by internal dynamics in the EU itself and by the greater penetration of the US Administration's ideas at the political and public opinion levels in some EU countries, particularly in eastern Europe, the EU member states have so far been quite united in withstanding US pressure and blackmail.³⁷ Particularly controversial were the US decisions to breach the deal reached by the P5+1 and the European Union with Iran over the latter's nuclear arsenal in 2015 (better known as the 'Iran nuclear deal') and the US step mentioned above, to move the American Embassy to Jerusalem. The Italian government led by Paolo Gentiloni until mid-2018 was especially upset by this American policy posture and by the US stance towards Libya. As will be discussed in greater detail below, this represents the priority for Italian foreign policy in the Mediterranean region. The new Italian government seems to have partially mended its transatlantic relations with the US, a key ally for Italy, although diverging opinions continue to exist within the country's public opinion. In this respect, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte's trip to Washington on 30 July 2018 played a key role in brokering a less tense bilateral relationship because Libya and

33 G. Sarcina, "Gerusalemme, scontro con Trump. All'Onu l'Italia con gli europei: 'Non siamo d'accordo con gli Usa'", *Corriere della Sera*, 9 December 2017, http://www.corriere.it/esteri/17_dicembre_08/gerusalemme-all-onu-rottura-stati-uniti-paesi-europei-francia-italia-mozione-contro-trump-97d70296-dc37-11e7-96bf-2722fd237ccc.shtml; "L'Assemblea generale Onu bocchia Gerusalemme capitale di Israele. Nikki Haley: 'Usa ricorderanno questo voto'", *Repubblica*, 21 December 2017, http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2017/12/21/news/israele_gerusalemme_capitale_assemblea_onu_vota_risoluzione-184820122.

34 These data were emphasised on the occasion of the first meeting of the *Joint Economic and Trade Commission (JETCO)* held in Istanbul on 22 February 2017 in the presence of the then Economic Development Minister, Carlo Calenda, and his Turkish counterpart, Nihat Zeybekci. See the interview with the Italian Ambassador in Turkey, L. Mattioli, published on *Tribuna economica*, 29 May 2017, http://www.ambankara.esteri.it/ambasciata_ankara/it/ambasciata/news/dall-ambasciata/2017/05/intervista-all-ambasciatore-d-italia.html and Ministero degli Esteri, *Turchia - A Istanbul prima riunione Jetco*, 24 February 2017, <https://www.esteri.it/mae/tiny/24281>.

35 Gabriele Del Grande was eventually released after two weeks of incarceration.

36 Ministero degli Esteri, *Turchia: preoccupazione del Ministro Gentiloni per gli arresti dei vertici del partito Hdp*, 4 November 2016, <https://www.esteri.it/mae/tiny/23679>; *Il ministro Alfano sugli esiti del referendum in Turchia*, 17 April 2017, <https://www.esteri.it/mae/tiny/24573>; *Dalla Farnesina massima attenzione sul caso del giornalista Gabriele Del Grande*, 18 April 2017, <https://www.esteri.it/mae/tiny/24583>.

37 A. Raji, "Trump's Tariffs and the Future of Transatlantic Ties", *War on the Rocks*, 5 June 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/trumps-tariffs-and-the-future-of-transatlantic-ties/>.



It is important to move away from a parochial and restrictive view of the Mediterranean and instead frame it as a 'global Mediterranean', namely a geopolitical space that has long been porous and open to influence.



Italian-American cooperation to stabilise the country was one of the key issues discussed between Conte and Trump.³⁸ The endorsement received from the US president on that occasion has sometimes been referred to as yet another sign of Trump's repeated attempts to weaken a common European front and policies to manage the challenges stemming from instability in the Mediterranean that currently confront the continent.³⁹

On the other hand, a common foreign policy towards the Mediterranean in 2016-2018 was not the EU's priority. While the ENP continues to pinpoint the broad contours of European action in the area, it is safe to argue that, as the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini has stated on a number of occasions, the EU has recently concentrated on other dossiers – namely, building a common European defence policy and, to a lesser extent, achieving a coordinated migration policy.⁴⁰ Against the background of the weakening transatlantic bond and the lack of EU-wide dynamism in the Mediterranean region, Italy has found itself in the position, more than in the past, of taking the initiative and favouring bilateral interactions, as is well illustrated by the case of Libya. Despite this, Rome has never lost sight of the EU framework of action, trying also to engage other member states in order to maximise the efficiency of its initiatives in the Mediterranean. Rome is very well aware that in order to achieve favourable outcomes in the wider Mediterranean, it has to maintain a strong commitment to multilateral, especially transatlantic and European, initiatives. This also means encouraging Italy's own partners and allies to foster a more coherent and sustainable multilateral cooperation while pursuing their own goals and interests. The key areas in which Italy has walked this tightrope in the past two years (2016-2018) are the management of regional conflicts and crises, with Libya being the prime example.

1.2.2 *Libya and Egypt: Two cases of Realpolitik*

In December 2015, the Libyan Political Agreement was sealed in Skirat and then enshrined in Resolution 2259 of the UN Security Council. The hopes were high for Libya to be rebuilt under the auspices of a legitimate unity government able to restore peace and security in the war-torn country, to defeat the expansion of Islamic State (ISIS) and to let friendly countries conduct counter-terrorism operations as set out in the Resolution.⁴¹ However, by the onset of 2016 it was already evident that the future of the agreement would not be as rosy as hoped. The deal has met with strong internal and external resistance, which has made its implementation virtually impossible. As a whole, western countries, including European ones, kept voicing their support for the agreement, but individually these countries approached the Libyan issue in different ways. France and partially Germany made counter-terrorism their priority, given their widespread and growing interests in the area and, above all, in reaction to the domestic attacks both countries suffered at the hands of Islamic State. As a result, fostering the creation of stable political institutions was not their key concern. Counter-terrorism operations were also at the core of the United States' interests in Libya – but making a stable and national unity government the precondition for any armed intervention in the country. While reaching out to its European partners within the anti-ISIS coalition, the American administration deemed Italy the best candidate to lead the operations. Against this backdrop, close cooperation between the United States and Italy was therefore struck up. In December 2015, Matteo Renzi's government organised an intergovernmental conference on Libya to be co-chaired by the two countries. The meeting took place in Rome and resulted in the commitment to support the central, internationally-recognised Libyan Government of National Accord that was eventually created in January 2016. On the counter-terrorism front, Italy largely welcomed the US stabilisation initiative. This hasty readiness to comply with the US proposal catalysed the impression, domestically and abroad, that the Italian

³⁸ See the *Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Conte of Italy in Joint Press Conference*, 30 July 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-prime-minister-conte-italy-joint-press-conference/>.

³⁹ E. Cuda, "Libia: Italia, cavallo di Troia di Donald Trump", *L'Indro*, 1 August 2018, <https://lindro.it/libia-italia-cavallo-di-troia-di-donald-trump/>.

⁴⁰ See the *Speech by HR/VP Federica Mogherini at the "Building on vision, forward to action: delivering on EU security and defence" event*, 13 December 2017, <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/37355/speech-hrvp-federica-mogherini->

⁴¹ See the text of the Resolution at the following link: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2259>.



Rome is very well aware that in order to achieve favourable outcomes in the wider Mediterranean, it has to maintain a strong commitment to multilateral, especially transatlantic and European, initiatives.



government was set for outright military intervention in the country.⁴² Rome was perfectly aware, however, of the risks deriving from an intervention before a political solution could be found according to the terms of the Libyan Political Agreement and the text of the UN resolution. Prime Minister Renzi therefore took a firm step back on 6 March 2016 by clarifying that “Italy [would] react only when there [was] a formally recognised government seeking help from the international community”; and that “Italy [would] react within an international, multilateral framework alongside its allies and certainly not by itself”.⁴³

Overall, Italy’s initially close position to Washington was also intended as a way of strengthening its posture in Europe with regard to the different and sometimes conflicting priorities of other member states such as France. Compared to Paris and its rather interventionist stance, Rome was more sensitive to the need to defend its economic interests in the country and above all to stem the unchecked flows of migrants and refugees sailing from the Libyan shores. Terrorism was thus less of a priority. Italy was keen on supporting a national government able to restrain irregular migration, and it was also keen on fostering economic relations rather than waging a war against Islamic State that could endanger the ongoing political process for Libya’s viable, long-term stability.⁴⁴

Italy’s strong stance against rushing into military action in Libya was appreciated by Italian public opinion, the parliament and opposition. It was also fully in line with the country’s traditional stance of respect for the institutions of the target countries, and for multilateralism and diplomacy as the only way out of conflicts. In the case of Libya, this attitude of compliance with the UN framework should not be read as abstract internationalism but as a response to concrete national interests. However, the lack of political progress in Libya eventually

undermined Italy’s position and clout. On 16 May 2016, a new intergovernmental conference of the anti-ISIS coalition in the context of Libya, modelled on the previous meeting in Rome, took place in Vienna. This time the meeting signalled a growing split between Italy and the USA and, more visibly, between Italy and the rest of the European countries, on the sequencing of a possible military intervention

to defeat ISIS and on the Libyan domestic institution-building process. As some analysts pointed out, “two different clocks are ticking: a diplomatic one to establish a Libyan unity government, and a military one to counter ISIS. The two are out of sync. Rome is unwilling to assume a leading role in Libya until a unity government is in place. Washington will not wait indefinitely to step up operations against ISIS”.⁴⁵

The meeting in Vienna also set a new course for the western coalition’s political orientation. Even though Fayez al-Serraj’s Government of National Accord was still formally recognised as the only state authority empowered to allow military intervention in Libya, the pre-eminence of General Khalifa Haftar (the strongman of the Cyrenaica region) on the Libyan scene had become such that he also had to be part of the equation. Yet the concrete efforts pursued by the European countries to include him in the negotiating process were weak at best, when not ambiguous (France was politically involved with the Libyan Political Agreement and militarily with Haftar). As a consequence of this lack of resolve or common approach on the European side, Serraj and his Government of National Accord started to face increasing challenges given that other countries, namely Egypt, Russia and the United Arab Emirates, kept channelling funds and military support towards the General. These circumstances contributed to “creat[ing] an international environment of informal support for Haftar and unfavourable to the achievement of a compromise”.⁴⁶

42 E. Rossi, “L’Italia in Libia: i piani di Renzi, i corpi speciali e i Servizi”, *Formiche*, 5 March 2016, <http://formiche.net/?p=488693>.

43 M. Galluzzo, “Missione in Libia, i paletti di Renzi. ‘Con me nessuna invasione’”, *Corriere della Sera*, 7 March 2016, p. 5, http://www.poliziadistato.it/rassegna/rassegna07_03.pdf. See also the interview with Paolo Gentiloni by G. Pelosi, “Per stabilizzare la Libia non servono guerre lampo”, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 6 March 2016, <https://www.esteri.it/mae/tiny/22271> and the interview with Roberta Pinotti by P. Valentino, “Pinotti: ‘Missione in Libia a tre condizioni. Ma possibili interventi di legittima difesa mirati’”, *Corriere della Sera*, 14 March 2016, https://www.difesa.it/Il_Ministro/Interviste/Pagine/Corsera20160314.aspx.

44 A number of scholars and commentators have opinions similar to the Italian position towards Libya, see, for example, F. Wehrey, *The Path Forward in Libya, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 3 March 2016, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/download/wehrey-testimony-030316>; M. Toaldo, “March to Folly 2.0: The Next Western Military Intervention in Libya”, in *ECFR Commentaries*, 2 February 2016, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_march_to_folly_2.o_the_next_western_military_intervention_in5083; K. Mezran and A. Varvelli, “Libyan crisis and the West: a political vision”, in *ISPI Commentaries*, 20 February 2016, <http://www.ispionline.it/it/node/14660>.

45 M. Garavoglia and L. Ben-Chorin, “Italy is the Key to Fighting ISIS in Libya”, *The National Interest*, 23 March 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/node/15560>.

46 A. Varvelli, “Libia”, *Focus Mediterraneo allargato*, No. 1, October 2016, p. 59, <http://www.ispionline.it/it/node/15929>.

Things became even more complicated following the May 2016 Al-Banyan al-Marsus operation implemented by some of the Misurata militias to free Sirte, and eventually the whole country, from ISIS. The Italian government expressed support for the Misurata forces. It sent some training and mine-clearing units and set up the Ippocrate medical support mission including a hospital assisted by a contingent for military protection.⁴⁷ At this juncture, Italy played an ill-defined political role, as did its fellow countries in the coalition. Moreover, after the death of Giulio Regeni, Italy lost further diplomatic clout when the Italian ambassador to Egypt was withdrawn. Indeed, in Italian eyes there is a strong connection between the Libyan and Egyptian dossiers, given the impact of Egypt's actions on the stabilisation (or lack thereof) of Libya.

In 2017 a new phase began in which Haftar's regional and international allies – under the lead of Russian diplomats – pushed the General to take part in negotiations. The partial re-habilitation of Haftar had direct implications for Italy's role in Libya, relegating it intermittently to a second-tier player compared to the initiatives of others, particularly France.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Rome put the containment of migration flows from Libya into even sharper focus. These now became the government's main priority, as documented in detail in the second part of this report. This new direction was launched and consolidated under Marco Minniti, the interior minister in Paolo Gentiloni's government (in power after Renzi's resignation in December 2016). However, it would be a mistake to consider this evolution as a result of the personal inclinations of the new prime minister or of the interior minister only. More correctly it was the reflection of a change of positions about migration within the Democratic Party, many differences existing within it. In an interview in 2017, Minniti declared: "I strongly believe that a modern democracy should have the ambition of not enduring, or chasing, demographic changes but rather dominate them. Here [as for terrorism] the biggest part of the game is played beyond the border. For Italy, on the other side of the Mediterranean".⁴⁹

While remaining committed to fostering viable and sustainable institutions in Libya, Italy worked hard during 2017 to implement its agenda on migration. This had negative implications for the stated goal of strengthening the Libyan Political Agreement and Serraj's position in the battle for power that was raging in the country. This conflict of priorities contributed to weakening Italy's position and to distancing it from a multilateral, EU-wide engagement with Libya. At the end of 2017, while stressing its unaltered support for UN mediation work, Italy seemed increasingly keen on implementing a Realpolitik approach towards Libya for the sake of its national interests. This Realpolitik approach included greater engagement with Haftar as a means of fostering a more inclusive solution to the Libyan crisis. In this sense, it is possible to argue that Italy's partially changing positions towards Libya contributed to bringing Italy back into the European fold, where a strong compromise emerged that was aimed at including Haftar in the negotiations. This orientation was also seen in the revised plan by the UN Special Envoy in Libya, Ghassan Salamé, which was outlined on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September 2017. One of the factors that led to this partial shift is the fact that US-Italy relations over Libya became less cooperative in 2017 compared to 2016, given the newly elected US president's intention not to be bogged down in the Libyan quagmire.⁵⁰ All in all, regardless of stronger migration flows from Libya, Italy's unconditional support to Serraj and the Libyan Political Agreement had become untenable with regard to the pragmatism of other European countries, in particular France, and without American backing. The trend towards the prioritisation of migration to the detriment of broader political and economic relations with Libya became the linchpin of the new Italian government in 2018. In this regard, the Realpolitik and the securitisation characterising Minniti's approach dwarf in comparison to the new interior minister's unashamed anti-migration approach.⁵¹

Meanwhile, Italy's relations with Egypt have recently developed along similar lines despite there being important differences in Italy's

47 Ministero della Difesa, *Operazioni internazionali: Operazione Ippocrate*, https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/op_ippocrate. See also G. Gaiani, "Cosa fanno le forze speciali italiane in Libia?", *Analisi Difesa*, 11 August 2016, <http://www.analisedifesa.it/?p=53254>.

48 F. Semprini, "Libia, la spallata di Macron all'Italia. A Parigi l'incontro fra Haftar e Serraj", *La Stampa*, 22 July 2017, <http://www.lastampa.it/2017/07/22/esteri/libia-la-spallata-di-macron-al-litalia-a-parigi-lincontro-fra-haftar-e-serraj-pU7NJORZNTbv8fkn2LgEuM/pagina.html>; N. Pedde, "Italia e Francia possono ancora davvero dirsi partner?", *Huffington Post*, 26 July 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.it/nicola-pedde/haftar-vince-roma-dorme-e-parigi-fa-danni_a_23048232.

49 Interview by I. Ciotti, "Minniti: 'Per l'Italia la partita si gioca oltre il Mediterraneo'", *AffariInternazionali*, 24 November 2017, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/?p=67340>.

50 President Trump confirmed American support to the UN and Serraj but, at the same time, he made it clear that the US was involved elsewhere and that Europe had to take care of the Libyan problem. See, for example, J. Diamond, "Trump, alongside Italian PM, says no US role in Libya", *CNN*, 20 April 2017, <http://cnn.it/2oUdDCY>; J. Prentis, "Trump reiterates support for Serraj government", *Libya Herald*, 1 December 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/?p=114052>.

51 T. Mezerisi, "Mr Salvini Goes to Tripoli", *ECFR Commentary*, 13 August 2018, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_mr_salvini_goes_to_tripoli.

relations with the two countries. Thanks to its geographical position and geopolitical importance, Egypt continues to be a fundamental player on the Mediterranean chessboard. In this context, Egypt's relationship with Italy is of particular importance, not only with regard to migration and energy issues, but also with regard to Cairo's role in Libya. In 2014 all of this led the then prime minister, Matteo Renzi, to invest politically in the new president of Egypt, the former general Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, openly praising the country's contribution to regional stability.⁵² However, Italy's relationship with Egypt was undermined by the brutal death of Giulio Regeni in January 2016, an event that led to the withdrawal of the Italian ambassador from Cairo in April 2016. This opened an acute crisis between the two countries, which was partially mitigated by the appointment of a new ambassador to Egypt in summer 2017, despite the Regeni case remaining unsolved. Since then, Italy's behaviour towards Cairo has been characterised by a strong dose of pragmatism aimed at fostering a more coordinated management of the Libyan crisis and containment of migratory flows. Strong economic and commercial ties and the prospect of further consolidation have also facilitated a rapprochement between the two countries. In recent years Cairo has provided weapons and political support to the Libyan general Khalifa Haftar, who – like President Al-Sisi – is an enemy of Islamist groups. Given the re-balancing of Italy's stance towards the Libyan political forces discussed above, a rapprochement with Cairo was the only realistic option for Rome not to risk seeing its weight undermined in Libya.

As regards the economic aspect of Italy's relations with Egypt, overcoming the diplomatic crisis triggered by the Regeni affair facilitated the re-launch of economic and commercial ties particularly in the energy sector, the historical pivot of the bilateral relationship between Rome and Cairo. Italy remains Egypt's third trading partner, the first at European level.⁵³ Despite the crisis in bilateral relations between the two countries between 2016 and 2017, by the end of 2017 Italy was able to consolidate the presence of its companies in Egypt that operate through direct investments or that participate in major development projects undertaken by the Egyptian authorities. Particularly significant is the activity of Eni, the main foreign oil operator in Egypt, which had already started its activities to exploit the gas resources of the Zohr giant field discovered in the waters of Egypt's exclusive

economic zone in the Mediterranean in 2015. In addition, Edison plays an important role as it is currently exploiting gas and oil reserves along the Mediterranean coast through a joint venture with the Egyptian Petroleum Company worth \$3 billion. In the banking sector, Intesa Sanpaolo is one of the first Italian investors in Egypt, having acquired 80% of the capital of Bank of Alexandria in December 2006 for €1.6 billion. Additional sectors that have seen growth in their economic relations between the two countries, particularly at the level of small and medium-sized enterprises, are the manufacturing sector, agriculture, and tourism. Maintaining the privileged relationship with Egypt clearly remains a priority for Italy. However, given the challenges facing Egypt in the short-to-medium term, stabilising the country on the basis of political inclusion should be a precondition for securing long-term stability for Egypt. All these arguments, unfortunately, are currently missing from the Italian discourse and policies on Egypt at the bilateral or multilateral levels, including the EU level.⁵⁴

In conclusion, the treatment of Italy's bilateral relations with Libya and Egypt confirms the pattern of foreign policy relations discussed above: over the last years, while engaging in a broader re-orientation of its foreign policy projection, Italy has increasingly concentrated on its traditional area of reference, operating with a holistic and cross-thematic approach when in line with its national interests and priorities, and selectively supporting multilateralism and cooperative frameworks. The second part of this report will analyse how this pattern has been challenged by the fact that Italy's foreign policy projection towards the Mediterranean is predominantly being shaped by the increasing weight that migration management has been attributed in Italy's broader foreign policy portfolio.

52 F. Schianchi, "Renzi fa fronte con al-Sisi: 'Solo lui può salvare il paese'", *La Stampa*, 12 July 2015.

53 InfoMercatiEsteri, *Egitto*, http://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/rapporti/r_101_egitto.pdf.

54 A. Abdel Ghaffar, A stable Egypt for a stable region: Socio-economic challenges and prospects, European Parliament, 19 January 2018, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EXPO_STU%282018%29603858.

PART TWO

ITALY'S ROLE IN MANAGING MIGRATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

2.1 MIGRATION FLOWS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

2.1.1 Routes, figures and drivers of migration flows crossing the Mediterranean to the EU

Before the topic of migratory flows to Europe started progressively to dominate the headlines, as it has done in recent years due to it increasingly being framed as a security concern, it was actually migration from and among European countries that represented the prevailing movement. In fact, European countries have only become a destination for migratory flows crossing the Mediterranean relatively recently. This trend started emerging in the 1960s and has seen an increase in the last two decades due particularly to local and regional conflicts, the scarcity of economic opportunities, and climate change. A better understanding of the drivers of these flows, the routes they have followed, and their composition, is key to understanding the policies that have partly contributed to shaping them.

Drivers of today's migratory movements are numerous, interconnected, and in constant evolution as dynamics rapidly change. Conflicts are one of the main drivers, producing internal displacement and forced migration. The Syrian case stands as the most evident example, with more than 5.6 million refugees having fled the country and 6.2 million having been internally displaced since the start of the conflict in 2011.⁵⁵ While only 11.7% of global refugees are currently hosted in the EU, 34.1% of asylum requests in the world pend in EU member states.⁵⁶ The changing nature of warfare has complicated the picture, as conflicts are becoming increasingly multi-layered with overlapping local, regional, national and international dimensions, and highlight a diversification in security actors.⁵⁷ Instability in the broader

Mediterranean region is further fuelled by the rise in radicalisation and violent extremism, as well as by the activities of organised criminal networks.

However, it is demographic trends and climate change that will increasingly influence migratory flows in the future. When looking at demography, there is a strong contrast between the significant decline in population that EU member states are witnessing (thus having an impact on socio-economic structures)⁵⁸ and the trends on the other side of the Mediterranean. Africa is today's main continent of origin for arrivals in the EU and Italy, and it not only represents the continent with the fastest population growth rate at 3.9% (with a population expected to triple by 2050 topping 330 million)⁵⁹ but also the most youthful (with 60% of the population being under 25 years old).⁶⁰ This booming demographic, generated not only by high fertility rates (of which Niger represents the world record with 7.8 births per woman) but also by a rise in life expectancy, is increasingly putting pressure on already scarce resources. The lack of access to basic services and economic opportunities in Africa constitute fertile ground for a prominent role of the informal labour market, as well as criminal economies such as the arms trade and the trafficking of human beings.⁶¹

In terms of climate challenges, experts warn that up to 150 million people could be displaced globally by the consequences of climate change by 2050.⁶² Climate risks such as flooding and droughts are not only set to represent the most important driver of migration in the future, but are already having an impact, such as in the case of the Lake Chad crisis where environmental degradation and rainfall/water variations have contributed to the displacement of more than 2.4 million people.⁶³ Similarly, according to some experts, water scarcity was

55 UNHCR, *Situation Syrian Regional Refugee Response*, and UNHCR, *Syria: Internally Displaced People*, both 30 November 2018.

56 Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2017*.

57 V. Arnould and F. Strazzari, *African Futures: Horizon 2025*, ISSUE report n.37, September 2017, p. 19, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/african-futures-horizon-2025>.

58 C. Reynaud and S. Miccoli, *Depopulation and the Aging Population: The Relationship in Italian Municipalities*, *Sustainability* 2018, 10, 1004.

59 J. Chataigner, J. Guigou and M. Thibon, *Pour une réponse durable et concertée aux défis du Sahel*, IPEMED Palimpstes n.15, December 2016, at p. 2, http://www.ipemed.coop/admin-ipemed/media/fich_article/1501151896_ipemed-palimpstes16sahelbd.pdf.

60 Arnould, Strazzari, op. cit.

61 M. Shaw, *Africa's changing place in the global criminal economy*, ENACT continental report 01, September 2017, <http://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2017-09-26-enact-continental-report1.pdf>.

62 R. Hasan, *Climate Change and migration: forced displacement, 'climate refugees' and the need for a new legal instrument*, Environmental Justice Foundation, 2011, https://ejfoundation.org/resources/downloads/EJF_climate-change-and-migration-2011.pdf, *Complexity: Climate, Migration, and Conflict in a Changing World*, US AID Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation Discussion Paper, November 2016.

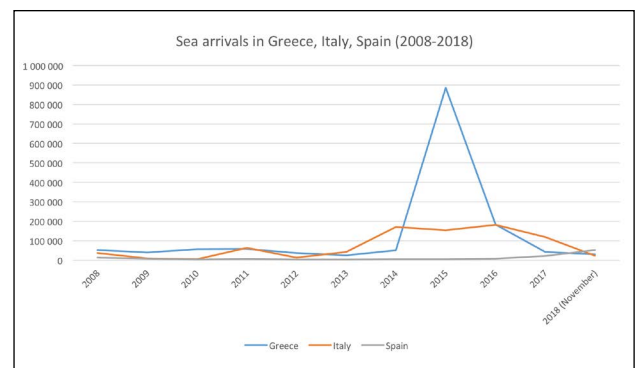
63 A. Tower, *Shrinking Options: The Nexus Between Climate Change, Displacement and Security in the Lake Chad Basin*, September 2017, <http://www.climate-refugees.org/fieldreports/2017/9/18/shrinking-options-the-nexus-between-climate-change-displacement-and-security-in-the-lake-chad-basin>.

one of the key factors contributing to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011.⁶⁴ In the Arab region, vulnerability in terms of water scarcity and dependence on food imports adds layers of complexity to the fragility of countries that are already subject to mass displacement and violent conflicts.⁶⁵

Intra- and trans-regional mobility is often a resilience strategy for overcoming climate and economic challenges. Northern African countries (particularly Libya and Algeria), for example, have long represented a destination for labour migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. Despite the significant changes that will be examined below, intra-African migration still represents the dominant movement today, with 19 million Africans living in another African country (compared to 9.3 million African-born people living in Europe).⁶⁶ Similarly, Arab Gulf states represent a key labour destination for migratory flows from African and South-East Asian countries, with migrants in the six Arab Gulf States accounting for more than 10 % of migrants globally.⁶⁷

A set of important changes that started to take place in the EU's wider neighbourhood in 2011 contributed in some measure to changing this picture: the onset of the Syrian conflict, together with the Arab uprisings and the civil war in Libya, represented an earthquake that led to several significant breaches in what could previously be considered as a buffer zone surrounding the EU. These factors contributed to a gradual increase in migratory flows across the Mediterranean towards the EU. Indeed, the most significant irregular influxes over recent years have been via three major sea routes: the Eastern Mediterranean route (EMR) mainly from Turkey to Greece, the Western Mediterranean route (WMR) mainly from Morocco to Spain, and the Central Mediterranean route (CMR) from North African countries such as Libya, Tunisia and Egypt to Italy. Over recent decades, these influxes have responded to very different dynamics. Irregular crossings to Greece via the EMR have varied over the years but never exceeded 60,000 before 2015, when they suddenly spiked to 885,386. The March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement resulted in a fall to 182,000 in 2016, and in 2017 numbers

fell further to the pre-2015 levels. In 2018, however, Greece saw a stark increase in arrivals compared to the previous year. Turkey was and still is the main point of departure for irregular crossings to Greece, with flows mainly composed of Syrians since the outbreak of the conflict, followed then by Afghans and Iraqis.⁶⁸ Spain received significant flows until 2008, after which tighter controls and enhanced cooperation with third countries led to a decrease, stabilising at an average of about 5,000 sea arrivals per year. In recent years, the number of irregular arrivals has started to increase: in 2016 arrivals nearly doubled compared to the previous trend, reaching more than 8,000. While both the CMR and EMR saw a significant drop in 2017, arrivals in Spain via the WMR spiked again. Out of over 22,000 irregular sea arrivals in Spain in 2017, 40% were of Algerian and Moroccan nationality.⁶⁹ Flows crossing the CMR to Italy will be analysed in the next section.



Source: Greece: *Frontex Annual Risk Analysis (2008-2016)*, UNHCR, *Situation Mediterranean (2017-2018)*; Italy and Spain: *Ministries of Interior (2008-2014)*; UNHCR, *Situation Mediterranean – Italy and Spain (2015-2018)*. [Updated as of November 2018]

When looking at recent trends, overall arrivals on Europe's shores had decreased by 34% by October 2018 compared to October 2017.⁷⁰ This decrease took place after flows in 2017 had already fallen by 67% compared to 2016. While Italy continued to experience a strong

64 P. H. Gleick, *Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria*, American Meteorological Society Journal, July 2014.

65 UNDP, *Climate Change Adaptation in the Arab States*, July 2018.

66 IOM, *World Migration Report, Migration and Migrants Update: Africa*, December 2017.

67 International Labour Organisation, *Arab States: Labour Migration*.

68 A. S. Okyay, *Bottom-up Approaches to EU-Turkey Migration Cooperation: A Call for Sustainable, Principled, Fair and Inclusive Governance*, Medreset WP 15, 2018, <http://www.iai.it/it/publicazioni/bottom-approaches-eu-turkey-migration-cooperation>.

69 Data from UNHCR, *Mediterranean Situation: Spain*.

70 UNHCR, *Europe monthly report: October 2018*.

decline in migrant arrivals (-83%), overall arrivals in Greece (+44%) and particularly Spain (+150%) increased significantly in 2018.⁷¹ In fact, Spain became the leading destination in 2018, with more than 50,000 arrivals by the end of October. Interestingly, these flows were mainly composed of West African nationals (Guinea and Mali being among the top three nationalities, together with Morocco), potentially hinting at a partial re-routing of flows following Italy's efforts in Libya and Niger (analysed below). Of all the nationalities arriving in Europe in 2018, Guineans are first on the list, followed by Syrians mainly entering via the EMR and Moroccans entering via Spain. By contrast, in 2017 when 67% of irregular arrivals were on Italy's shores, the main nationalities were Nigerians, Guineans and Ivoirians. This shows that despite some interconnection between the routes there is quite a clear-cut geography of flows and nationalities when it comes to migration across the Mediterranean. As reported by the UNHCR, the risks for those migrating towards Europe remained very high in 2018, if not even higher than in the previous years: reported deaths at sea stood at 1,987 in October 2018. Out of these, the majority are reported to have died in the attempt to cross the CMR. Taking the strong decrease in arrivals in Italy into consideration, the death rate by August 2018 was much higher (one in 18) compared to the 2017 average (one in 42).⁷²

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A common foreign policy towards the Mediterranean in 2016-2018 was not the EU's priority.

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2.1.2 Routes, figures and origins of migration flows to Italy

Before the increase in of migratory flows across the Mediterranean Sea and into Europe, which affected Italy, together with Spain and Greece, in a particular way due to their geographic locations at the external borders of the EU, the topic of migration was usually connected with Italy's history. In fact, for most of the 20th century Italy was traditionally a country of great exodus, both to other European countries, and also crossing the ocean to America. The strong economic growth that Italy

experienced between 1950 and 1980 resulted in the first inflows of foreign labour migrants from Africa and Asia, while the dissolution of the Soviet Union set the scene for increasing migration from Eastern Europe, particularly Albania and Romania.⁷³ The lack of regulation for these flows resulted in a strong presence of migrants on the irregular

labour market (particularly in the construction, domestic care, and agriculture sectors), although their presence was nevertheless often later regularised through so-called sanatorie. Still today, there is a significant share of foreign-born workers in Italy's labour market: there are more than 2.4 million registered foreign workers, whose contribution to the Italian economy is calculated at €127 billion, which represents nearly 9% of Italy's total wealth (without taking the weight of the informal economy into consideration).⁷⁴ Out of these, more than two-thirds work in low-skilled jobs, and are mostly over-educated but under-paid, their remuneration being on average nearly 30% lower than that of Italian nationals.⁷⁵

71 *ibid.*

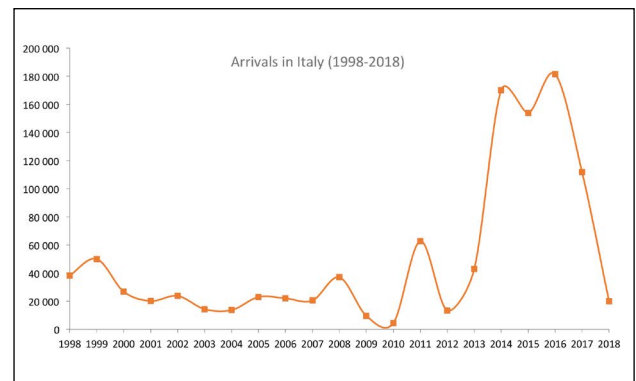
72 UNHCR, *Desperate Journeys, January-August 2018*. [These data are nevertheless only partial because they only count reported deaths, and because of multiple persons attempting more than one crossing to Europe.]

73 G. Bettin and E. Cela, *L'evoluzione storica dei flussi migratori in Europa e in Italia*, 2014. http://www.unescochair-iuav.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/UR-AN_Bettin-Cela_def.pdf

74 IDOS, *op. cit.* The number of foreign citizens regularly residing in Italy exceeded 5 million in 2016, of which nearly 70% were non-EU citizens.

75 IDOS, *op. cit.*

This scenario first changed as an immediate consequence of the Arab uprisings, when in 2011 crossings from North Africa to Italy reached a new record level of 64,300, of which 45% were Tunisians. However, the real turning point for Italy was in 2014, when an average of more than 168,000 people started arriving at Italy's coasts on a yearly basis. This was due firstly to the intensification of conflicts in the Sahel (eg. Mali, Chad, Niger), and secondly to the circumstances resulting from the Arab uprisings. These circumstances had an impact on previous destination countries (such as Libya) for labour migrants, because once these countries lost their absorption capacity due to conflict and a worsening socio-economic situation, they often turned into points of transit migration towards central and northern Europe.



Source: Years 1998-2014: Compilation by the ISMU Foundation based on data provided by the Italian Ministry of Interior; Years 2014-2018: Italian Ministry of Interior, *Cruscotto statistico giornaliero*. [Updated on 30 November 2018]

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*It is demographic trends
 and climate change that
 will increasingly influence
 migratory flows in the future.*
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The sudden increase in migratory flows and the lack of pre-existing national regulations for them contributed to a policy framework which, still today, is constantly being adjusted to newly arising needs and challenges, and which can generally be said to be more of a reactive than proactive nature.⁷⁶ Inflows clearly had a strong impact on the reception and asylum systems: among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) members, Italy ranks third with 123,000 asylum requests lodged in 2016. The 2017 Economic and Financial Document (DEF) foresaw expenditure of €5 billion in 2018 for the reception (68.4%), health and education (12.7%) and search and rescue (18.9%) of migrants. This is in addition to the total allocation of more than €800 million by the European Commission since 2015 through the AMIF and ISF funds.⁷⁷ In recent years, asylum decisions have stabilised with approximately 40% of applicants being granted protection at the administrative stage. Out of these, in 2017 around 8% were granted refugee status, while 8.5% and 25% were respectively granted subsidiary and humanitarian protection.⁷⁸ The recent adoption of the so-called Salvini decree, which provides for the elimination of the humanitarian protection status, has led experts to fear that this will result in a strong increase in people staying irregularly, which would add to the already more than 490,000 foreigners currently estimated

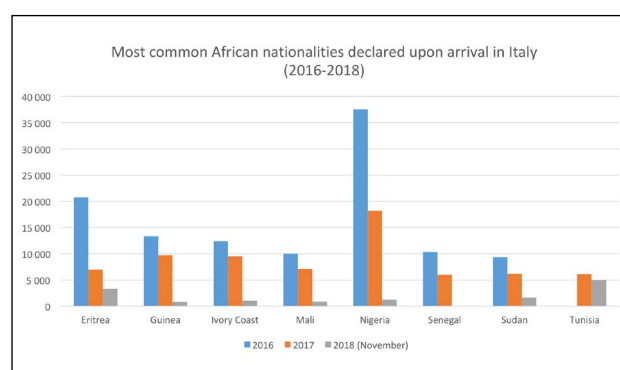
76 C. Hermanin, *Immigration Policy in Italy: Problems and Perspectives*, IAI Working Paper, 2017, <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1735.pdf>.

77 European Commission, *Factsheet: EU Financial Support to Italy*, November 2017.

78 Ministry of Interior, *Dati Asilo 2017*, http://www.libertacivilimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/dati_asilo_2017_.pdf.

to be irregularly present on Italian ground.⁷⁹ In fact, due to the difficulties in implementing returns, out of the 36,240 who were ordered to leave Italy in 2017, only 19% were effectively returned.⁸⁰

For some years the mix of a lack of willingness and a lack of means resulted in Italy's non-compliance with the EU identification and processing obligations. Out of 164,000 arrivals in Italy in 2014, only 64,000 registered for asylum while 100,000 moved further north in Europe.⁸¹ Only following repeated calls by other EU member states for Italy to step up fingerprinting efforts and implementation of the 'hotspot' approach, did registration rates finally reach 97% in 2016.⁸² This increase in migrant registration rates was nevertheless not only due to an increased capacity in the management of flows on the part of the Italian authorities, but also to the decrease in arrivals by a set of nationalities (particularly Syrians and Eritreans which had constituted 45% of arrivals in 2014) that strongly opposed identification so as to move further north.⁸³ In terms of the composition of flows, West Africans made up 64% of arrivals in 2017, representing six of the top ten nationalities arriving in Italy via the CMR.⁸⁴ This changed significantly in 2018, when Italy then saw a strong decrease in Nigerians and other West African nationalities, and instead a predominance of Tunisians and Eritreans. While this may hint at some West African nationalities having potentially shifted their movements towards the WMR via Morocco, or being blocked already along the route northwards or in Libya itself, it is too early to see this as a direct result of migration cooperation with Niger and Libya.



Source: Years 1998-2014: Compilation by the ISMU Foundation based on data provided by the Italian Ministry of Interior; Years 2014-2018: Italian Ministry of Interior, *Cruscotto statistico giornaliero*. [Updated on 30 November 2018]

Following strong efforts by the Gentiloni government to curb arrivals in Italy, numbers went down to 119,369 in 2017. This trend was further reinforced in 2018, when arrivals decreased by 80% in the first seven months of the year compared to the same period of the previous year, with only 23,000 having reached Italy's shores by the end of November.⁸⁵ Despite the sharp fall in arrivals, migration resulted in being a key topic in the 2018 parliamentary elections – and beyond.⁸⁶ This was a novelty as migration had never previously been a big election issue in Italy, and represented the consequence of an electoral campaign characterised by xenophobic and anti-migratory rhetoric by some political forces. In criticising the former governments for their management of the migration issue, previous opposition parties (the League, and the Five Star Movement) built on the criticism generally shared by a large part of Italian public opinion regarding the insufficient role played by the EU. They also built on the argument of having

79 Fondazione ISMU, *XXIII Rapporto sulle Immigrazioni: 2017*.

80 European Commission, *Progress report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration*, COM/2018/301 final, May 2018, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0301>.

81 M. Braun, *Reactive, not Proactive: Migration and the Left in Italy*, in M. Bröning, C. P. Mohr (ed.), *The Politics of Migration and the Future of the European Left*, Dietz, 2018.

82 IOM, *Registration and identity management of irregular migrants in the EU*, January 2018, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/gmdac_data_briefing_series_issue_12.pdf.

83 Hearing of A. Pansa in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Head of the Italian Police, 20 January 2016, http://documenti.camera.it/leg17/resoconti/commissioni/stenografici/html/69/audiz2/audizione/2016/01/20/indice_stenografico.0037.html.

84 The six countries are: Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal and Gambia. Ministero dell'Interno, *Cruscotto giornaliero*, 31.12.2017, http://www.libertacivilimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/cruscotto_statistico_giornaliero_31-12-2017.pdf.

85 Italian Ministry of Interior, *Cruscotto Statistico Giornaliero*, 30 November 2018.

86 A. Palm, *Leading the Way? Italy's External Migration Policies and the 2018 Elections: An Uncertain Future*, IAI Commentary, March 2018, <http://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/leading-way-italys-external-migration-policies-and-2018-elections>.

been left alone to face a huge responsibility that is largely perceived as a security challenge. These feelings are further reinforced by Italian public opinion's strong overestimation of the presence of foreigners in Italy. Recent surveys show that while Italian public opinion believes the percentage of non-EU immigrants stands at 25%, it actually hovers around 7%.⁸⁷ Although overestimation is common in all EU member states, it is interesting to note that Italians have a 10% higher margin of error than the average of EU respondents.⁸⁸

2.2 ITALY'S EXTERNAL MIGRATION POLICIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BETWEEN EU ACTIONS AND BILATERAL INITIATIVES

2.2.1 *The Italian approach to external migration policy*

It is only over the last few years that Italy can be said to have started developing a vision in its external migration policies. This delay is due both to the above-mentioned tendency to develop reactive policies in response to peaks in flows instead of programming long-term responses, and to the lack of continuity in key political positions. In fact, the high turnover in Italian governments (with eight prime ministers succeeding each other since the start of the new millennium) has hampered the development of steady points of reference and policies.⁸⁹ Moreover, the vision of, and the approach towards, migration vary substantially depending on the ministry (Interior, Foreign Affairs, Defence) or agency (ie, Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, AICS) at issue.

In the 2017 Italian Strategy for the Mediterranean, migration is recognised as a structural and long-term challenge, which requires an integrated approach – namely, understanding that the relations

between countries of origin, transit and destination are founded on the principles of cooperation, partnership and shared responsibility.⁹⁰ Italy's external migration policy has consequently been founded on the two-fold approach of promoting both solidarity and security. This approach, which is repeatedly recalled in speeches and (non-) official documents, has nevertheless been used in different ways: certain documents refer, on the one hand, to Italy's humanitarian efforts to protect lives at sea and the rights of individuals, and, on the other, to the strong fight against smuggling and irregular migrant flows;⁹¹ while other documents express the need to search for the correct balance between the right to mobility and the right of states to determine criteria for the admission of people to their territory.⁹² In order to put this approach into practice, Italy promotes a mix of short-term and long-term policies. In fact, the Italian strategy provides for both a border control and third country capacity-building dimension in the short term, and the promise to fight the root causes of migration in the long term through development aid, investment and job creation projects in countries of origin and transit. This two-pronged approach is also reflected in the view that irregular migration must be fought before regular channels can be opened.⁹³

Italy also supports the idea that, due to the nexus between migration, development and security, these policies should not be tackled separately, but jointly. This is particularly evident in the Italian development agency's approach, which repeatedly recalls this nexus in its programming document, putting 'migration lenses' on Italy's development response, and carrying consequences both in the choice of priority areas (increasingly tackling areas with a 'migration potential') and in the choice of the policy responses themselves.⁹⁴ The increase in support for development cooperation projects (analysed in more detail in section 2.2.3) has often been argued to contribute to the prevention of migration to Europe by tackling the 'root causes' of migratory flows, as summed up in the slogan *aiutiamoli a casa loro* ('let's help

87 Istituto Cattaneo, *Immigrazione in Italia: tra realtà e percezione*, August 2018, <http://www.cattaneo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Analisi-Istituto-Cattaneo-Immigrazione-realt%C3%A0-e-percezione-27-agosto-2018-1.pdf>.

88 *ibid.*

89 Berlusconi 2001-2006, Prodi 2006-2008, Berlusconi 2008-2011, Monti 2011-2013, Letta 2013-2014, Renzi 2014-2016, Gentiloni 2016-2018, Conte 2018-present.

90 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean: stabilising the crisis and building a positive agenda for the region*, December 2017, <http://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2017/12/med-maeci-eng.pdf>.

91 *ibid.*

92 MAECI (DGIT), *Towards the 2018 global compact for a safe, orderly and regular migration: Italian vision*, 2018, https://refugeemigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/non_paper_italy.pdf.

93 MAECI, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean*, *op. cit.*

94 AICS - ICID, *Towards Sustainable Migration – Interventions in countries of origin*, January 2017, https://www.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Towards_sustainable_migration_ENG.pdf.



It is only over the last few years that Italy can be said to have started developing a vision in its external migration policies.



them in their own homes’),⁹⁵ despite this clearly representing a simplified understanding of the drivers of migration.

Non-papers such as the ‘Migration Compact’ (Renzi government, 2016)⁹⁶ have sponsored Italy’s approach also at the European level, and are testimony to the attempt to push the EU to commit significant and targeted political and economic capital to engage in dialogue with Africa. This is in line with the partial re-orientation of Italy’s foreign policy towards the Sahel and the African continent, as discussed in the previous section of this report. The compact calls for strong cooperation with third countries in order to manage migration flows strategically. It takes the EU-Turkey statement as an example of successful large-scale cooperation and calls for replication of this approach with African countries of origin and transit. While the ‘EU Multilevel Strategy For Migration’ (Conte government, 2018) was described by the current prime minister as a “completely new [...] Italian proposal”, it is actually quite in line with the Migration Compact presented by Renzi in 2016. In fact, it recalls the need for an integrated and multi-level approach, which aims at long-term management instead of reactive policies, with the dual aim of strengthening rights and responsibilities. Beyond the partnerships with countries of origin and transit, it calls for intra-EU shared responsibility in processing the asylum requests of those saved at sea, and expresses the need first to regulate primary movements (ie, to Europe) before tackling secondary movements (ie, intra-EU). Before recently taking a significant step backwards concerning the endorsement of the Global Compact for Safe Orderly and Regular Migration (Global Compact),⁹⁷ Italy had been heavily engaged in the negotiations for this, promoting its view on migration by presenting a paper detailing its vision, which again is founded on the values of partnership and responsibility among countries of origin, transit and destination, both in the management of migration and in the protection of migrants and refugees. The main objectives were said to be i) the protection of the most vulnerable; ii) investment, both through public and private channels, in countries of origin and transit with the aim of improving the management of migratory flows and combatting their root causes; and iii) valuing the positive aspects of safe and legal migration.⁹⁸

Italy has put its approach into practice through a number of different instruments and at various policy-making levels. Historically, the bilateral dimension was very strong in the 2000s, when Italy reached several bilateral agreements with countries located in North Africa and in the Horn of Africa, aimed at enhancing local police and border control capacities through the provision of training, vehicles or other devices. This approach showed continuity over different governments, as both the right-wing governments (2001-2006, and 2008-2011) and left-wing government (2006-2008) pursued these agreements with third countries such as Tunisia and Libya.⁹⁹ This approach, with a focus on border management capacities, has again become dominant in the last two years (as analysed in section 2.2.3). Over time, and also as a consequence of the re-working of EU competences on the basis of the Lisbon Treaty (effective since 1 December 2009), the advantage of reinforcing the bilateral dimension through the European dimension came to be acknowledged. Italy started taking the view that the anchoring of its policies to the European dimension provides greater chances of the long-term efficacy of its actions; but recently, increasing uneasiness in the public debate concerning the (perceived) insufficiency of the EU’s actions has pushed more and more policies out of the EU decision-making realm.

This has resulted, on the one hand, in the search for a ‘coalition of the willing’ among a set of EU member states (mainly Italy, France, Germany and recently also Spain) and, on the other hand, has resulted in increased meetings among countries of transit and destination, such as the Central Mediterranean contact group (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Libya, Malta, Slovenia, Switzerland, Tunisia and the HR Mogherini) or the so-called Cabina di Regia (control room), composed of the interior ministers of Chad, Italy, Libya, Mali and Niger. In fact, over recent years an inverse trend of de-Europeanisation can be observed both with regard to EU member states increasingly taking back competence, and with regard to some key member states influencing, and to a certain extent even pre-determining, the decisions taken later at EU level. A similar trend can be observed also concerning the multilateral dimension when looking at the recent decision of the Italian government not to participate in the intergovernmental

95 La Stampa, “Aiutiamoli a casa loro”: polemica sui social per la frase di Renzi, July 2017.

96 Italian Government, *Migration Compact: Contribution to an EU Strategy for External Action on Migration*, 15 April 2016, http://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/immigrazione_o.pdf.

97 ANSA, *Italy not signing Global Compact - Salvini*, 28 November 2018.

98 MAECI (DGIT), *op. cit.*

99 M. Braun, *op. cit.*

conference in Marrakesh for the adoption of the UN Global Compact. This decision also highlights the tendency of the Interior Ministry increasingly to take the lead in decisions and policies related to migration, even when these are part of the foreign policy portfolio.

The turn away from the Global Compact is particularly telling, as this was announced by Interior Minister Salvini, contradicting the official line of not only Italy's Foreign Ministry but also of the prime minister, who just two months earlier had called for a strengthening of multilateralism and who had expressed the government's support for the Global Compact, arguing that the "migratory phenomena require a structured and multi-level response from the international community as a whole" during the UN General Assembly debate.¹⁰⁰

2.2.2 Italian demands and actions within the EU framework

Despite recurrent changes in the political landscape, a constant in Italy's approach has been its quest for greater action by the EU institutions and other EU member states. Even the new government, while being very outspoken in its criticism of the EU, is so far continuing its support for this greater action, with Interior Minister Salvini arguing that Italy has the role of saving European values, and will reshape the EU from within.¹⁰¹ However, criticism towards the EU is also often directed at the wrong targets: by referring indiscriminately to 'the EU', the different positions among the institutions and the nature of the decision-making processes are oversimplified. Furthermore, the European Parliament (EP) and Commission have often advocated positions that were in line with Italy's demands (the prime example being the EP's position on the Dublin reform, which proposed the automatic and mandatory relocation of all asylum seekers reaching European countries' shores). In fact, it is in the Council that these proposals were mostly watered down. Indeed Council meetings often represent the battle scene of member states defending clashing interests on migration policies. This leads to the adopted decisions being a minimum common denominator of generic proposals, which are rarely of a truly innovative nature.

Long before the 2014 spike in irregular sea arrivals in Europe, dialogues on migration-related issues had been initiated and pursued at multiple levels by the EU, with talks at the continental (eg, Africa-EU Migration and Mobility Dialogue), regional (eg, Rabat Processes) and bilateral level. However, concrete policies and significant funding rarely followed these dialogues. Despite the 2005 Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) setting the scene for more structured cooperation through Mobility Partnerships (MPs), these have so far only been concluded with nine countries.¹⁰² The spike in EU common external migration policies in 2015 was driven on the one hand by the unprecedented peak in migratory flows along the Western Balkans route (and the consequent collapse of the Schengen system) and on the other hand, by the April 2015 drowning in the Central Mediterranean, which provoked a singular public outcry. These events put cooperation with third states on migration management at the top of the EU member states' priority list, and numerous proposals were put forward. The special meeting of the Council in April 2015 identified the "prevention of illegal flows" as a priority to be tackled by stepping up political cooperation with countries of transit.¹⁰³ Efforts consequently focused on Turkey as the main gateway to Europe in 2015, but also increasingly on the relations with countries of origin and transit in Africa.

In 2015 the Common Agendas on Migration and Mobility (CAMM) were thus launched with Nigeria and Ethiopia. These are structured dialogues, which take into consideration all pillars of migration (irregular, regular, international protection, development and readmission), and have led the way for a range of high-level dialogues with countries of origin and transit. Later in November 2015, the Valletta summit between European and African heads of state and government called for a global approach, aimed at addressing root causes in Africa, enhancing legal migration and fostering international protection. It was at this summit that the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) was also created, an instrument aimed at pooling the contributions of EU institutions and member states for migration management, and at fostering stability in affected countries. Of the €3.94 billion currently allocated to the EUTF, 88% originates from the European Development Fund (EDF) and other EU financial instruments, while member states only contribute to the remaining 12%. This has raised criticism from

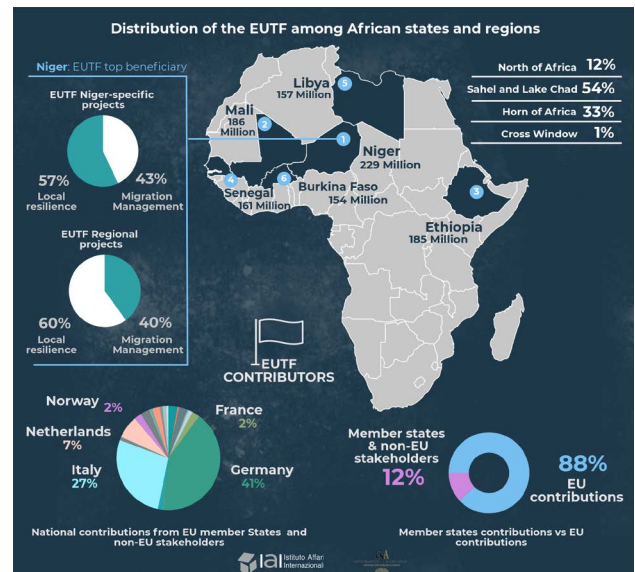
¹⁰⁰ Intervention by Mr. Giuseppe Conte, General Assembly Debate, 26 September 2018, <https://gadebate.un.org/en/73/italy>.

¹⁰¹ V. Walt, "We Want to Change Things from Within" - Italy's Matteo Salvini on His Goal to Reshape Europe, Time, September 2018, <http://www.interno.gov.it/it/sala-stampa/interventi-e-interviste/we-want-change-things-within-italys-matteo-salvini-his-goal-reshape-europe>.

¹⁰² Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Cape Verde, Georgia, Jordan, Moldova, Morocco, and Tunisia.

¹⁰³ Special meeting of the European Council, 23 April 2015 - statement, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/04/23/special-euco-statement/>.

civil society and experts as to the re-orientation of development funds to an instrument which includes the financing of projects aimed at increasing the capacity of third countries' border and security forces.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the EUTF currently has a financing gap of about €550 million.



Infographic developed by the author in collaboration with Luca Barana (Centre for African Studies). Updated as of February 2018.

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Despite recurrent changes in the political landscape, a constant in Italy's approach has been its quest for greater action by the EU institutions and other EU member states.
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In 2016, further steps forward were made through the creation of the New Partnership Framework (NPF), taking up some of the proposals launched by Italy's Migration Compact (see previous section). The NPF represents the overarching framework for tailor-made partnerships ('compacts') with third countries, which can be of different natures: from technical and legal agreements, to political memoranda for cooperation.¹⁰⁵ The identification of Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali and Ethiopia as priority countries clearly shows how the political attention in 2016 shifted from the Eastern Mediterranean Route (which had seen a strong decrease in crossings due to the EU-Turkey statement) to origin and transit countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Efforts in migration management cooperation with third states have not gone hand in hand with increased offers in terms of regular access channels. While the importance of such channels has repeatedly been

104 Global Health Advocates, *Misplaced Trust: Diverting EU Aid to stop Migration*, September 2017, http://www.ghadvocates.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Misplaced-Trust_FINAL-VERSION.pdf, O. De Guerry, A. Stocchiero, 'Partnership or conditionality? Monitoring the Migration Compacts and EU Trust Fund for Africa', Concord Europe, January 2018, <https://concordeurope.org/2018/01/24/monitoring-eu-trust-fund-africa-publication/>.

105 European Commission, *On Establishing a New Partnership Framework with Third Countries under the European Agenda on Migration*, COM (2016) 385, 07.06.2016.



In line with the EU's trend of focusing efforts mainly on reducing inflows, little attention in Italy has been dedicated to creating regular access channels.



endorsed in the EU's framework documents on migration, these assertions have so far not been reflected in practice: there are currently few means and even fewer resources invested in promoting legal migration channels, particularly if compared with the means and resources aimed at control-oriented measures. This trend is also reflected in the Commission proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, where the strongest increases concern the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG) and the section on border management.¹⁰⁶ Given that the topic of legal access channels has mainly stayed within member states' competence, the EU framework only covers the options of short-term visas, high-skilled migration (the Blue Card Directive), family reunifications, and mobility for students and researchers. It is to be hoped that the pilot projects on legal migration to be coordinated and financed by the Commission, which would see interested EU member states providing access schemes for labour or traineeship purposes for a set of third countries, might signal a positive step towards the understanding of the fundamental importance of regular access channels for medium- and low-skilled workers.¹⁰⁷ Such channels might in fact have the potential to lower the percentage of individuals applying for asylum while not possessing the requirements. Indeed, as long as there are no labour migration channels, the abuse of the asylum system for non-protection reasons will continue, potentially also leading to increasing loss of public and institutional support for asylum, as well as increasing the burden on coastal member states for search and rescue (SAR), reception and the processing of claims.¹⁰⁸

2.2.3 Bilateral initiatives in 2017-2018

Despite the above-mentioned developments at EU level, there was increased uneasiness in Italian public opinion in 2017 around the topic of migration, and particularly around the perceived lack of support from the EU and its member states. With elections coming up in spring 2018, the Gentiloni government, which had just taken office in December 2016, felt it had to step up its efforts substantively. The lead was taken by Interior Minister Minniti, who significantly accelerated a set of policies that had already been outlined previously: on the one hand, Italy stepped up its bilateral cooperation with countries of origin and transit, and, on the other hand, it demanded increased efforts from other EU member states. The main objective was stated to be the management of migratory flows;¹⁰⁹ in fact, a significant reduction of the inflow was seen as a key step both to fostering public consensus, and to giving Italy more leverage in EU discussions on some key aspects of the internal dimension of the EU migration agenda, such as relocation, the Dublin reform and the Schengen system.

Libya was identified as a key partner, and the memorandum of understanding signed between the two countries on 2 February 2017 set off a season of renewed partnership, building on a past history of cooperation in terms of migration management. In fact, since 2000 Italy had signed several agreements aimed at curbing migration flows departing from Libya's shores, and at outsourcing migration control policies, financing structures and the training of local authorities.¹¹⁰ The 2017 memorandum was reinforced through dialogues with local and non-state actors in Libya, as well as with the UN-backed Al-Serraj government and opposition forces. Italy's strategy was both to strengthen Libya's southern land border control system through cooperation with local authorities (mostly tribal leaders, mayors and militia strongmen) and to reinforce the capabilities of the Libyan "coastguard" (LCG) in order to increase its role in intercepting boats leaving from Libyan

¹⁰⁶ European Commission, *EU budget for the future: migration and border management*, May 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-proposals-migration-border-management-may2018_en.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ Dimitris Avramopoulos, *Speech at the European Parliament Plenary Session: Progress on the UN Global Compacts for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and on Refugees*, April 2018, <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/43156/speech-european-parliament-plenary-session-progress-un-global-compacts-safe-orderly-and-en>. European Commission, *Communication on the Delivery of the European Agenda on Migration*, COM (2017) 558 final, 29 September 2017.

¹⁰⁸ European Commission, *Towards More Accessible, Equitable and Managed Asylum Systems*, COM (2003) 315, June 2003, at p.12; E. Guild et al., *Enhancing the Common European Asylum System and Alternatives to Dublin*, European Parliament Study, July 2016, at p.11, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/it/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2015\)519234](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/it/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2015)519234).

¹⁰⁹ Comunicazioni del Governo sulla lotta contro il traffico di esseri umani nel Mediterraneo, Senato, *Resoconto stenografico Commissioni riunite Esteri e Difesa*, seduta n. 30, 26 luglio 2017, <http://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/332428.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of Italy-Libya relations before 2010 see: N. Ronzitti, *The Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya: New Prospects for Cooperation in the Mediterranean*, *Bulletin of Italian Politics* (2009) Vol.1, No.1, pp.125-133.

shores.¹¹¹ The Italian and European support for the LCG resulted in the declaration of a Libyan SAR zone, and increased interceptions: by early September 2018, around 13,493 people had been intercepted at sea and taken back to Libya.¹¹² These actions were reinforced by a clamp-down on NGOs operating in search and rescue in the Mediterranean (analysed below). In addition to this, numerous other projects have been launched, ranging from the Guardia di Finanza¹¹³ providing training to 200 law enforcement officials in Libya and other sub-Saharan countries, to the integrated border management project which is financed through the EUTF with a significant contribution from Italy.¹¹⁴

Italy is also working to promote the field presence of NGOs and international organisations (mainly the UNHCR and IOM), with the aim of ensuring the protection of migrants' rights, particularly in detention centres.¹¹⁵ This was most probably a reaction to the strong criticism Italy had to face concerning the inhumane conditions and torture that migrants are subjected to when intercepted by the Libyan authorities – conditions that have recently been examined in detail by an Italian Court case.¹¹⁶ Human rights organisations and researchers have repeatedly condemned Italy for cooperating with Libyan authorities, abandoning asylum seekers to human rights abuses and de facto preventing them from access to international protection.¹¹⁷ In addition to criticism concerning the content of the memorandum, Italy has recently been challenged before the Italian Constitutional Court due to its lack of parliamentary ratification of

the government's initiative, with claims of violation of Article 80 of the Italian Constitution.¹¹⁸

Niger was identified as the second key partner in managing flows along the Central Mediterranean route,¹¹⁹ due to its crucial geographic location, relative political stability and readiness to engage with European partners.¹²⁰ Back in 2014, the Italian Ministry of Interior had already funded the Agadez transit centre, aimed at providing health and psychological support, information and voluntary returns.¹²¹ When in 2015 numbers in transit through Niger tripled (5,000 to 7,000 transiting each week, compared to the 120,000 registered in transit in the whole of 2014),¹²² turning Niger into the prime passageway for the majority of sub-Saharan migrants bound for Libya and then Italy, the country started to make its way to Italy's priority list. The opening of an Italian embassy in March 2017 represented the first step of an ever stronger cooperation, which encompasses a bilateral security cooperation agreement signed in September 2017, and a €50 million budget support project (ADJUSEN) aimed at reinforcing local border control capacities.¹²³ Increased EU and Italian pressure possibly also represented the main trigger of the sudden implementation of the Nigerien 36/2015 anti-trafficking law,¹²⁴ which, nearly one and a half years after its adoption, was massively enforced for the first time in 2017. The unprecedented repressive clampdown which followed saw numerous arrests and seizures of vehicles, with the effect of substantively reducing registered flows towards Libya.¹²⁵ In fact, by the second

111 Libyan Investment, *Libyan Italian Joint Committee Concerned With Migration Meets In Tripoli*, July 2018, <https://www.libyaninvestment.com/libya-government/286585-libyan-italian-joint-committee-concerned-with-migration-meets-in-tripoli>.

112 UNHCR, *Libya Flash Update*, 7 September 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/65474>.

113 Italian Police Force that deals with fiscal matters.

114 EUTF, *Support to Integrated border and migration management in Libya*, https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/north-africa/libya/support-integrated-border-and-migration-management-libya-first-phase_en.

115 AICS, *Assistenza tecnica ad interventi per migliorare la gestione e l'accesso ai servizi essenziali delle municipalità libiche*, Second call deadline: September 2018.

116 Corte d'assise di Milano, sent. 10 ottobre 2017, (dep. 1 dicembre 2017), Pres. Ichino, Est. Simi, Imp. Matammud.

117 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *AL ITA 4/2017*, November 2017, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=23486>.

118 ASGI, *Mancata ratifica parlamentare del memorandum Italia-Libia: al via il ricorso alla Corte Costituzionale*, February 2018, <https://www.asgi.it/asilo-e-protezione-internazionale/mancata-ratifica-parlamento-memorandum-italia-libia-ricorso-corte-costituzionale/>.

119 Interview of the author with the EU delegation to Niger, 31.10.2017.

120 Interview of the author with the Italian Embassy to Niger, 18.10.2017.

121 IOM, *IOM Opens Agadez Transit Centre in Niger Desert*, November 2014, <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-opens-agadez-transit-centre-niger-desert>.

122 Interview of the author with IOM Niger, 31 October 2017. It was specified that these numbers are conservative, as the IOM has two stable tracking points in Niger (one towards Libya and one towards Algeria) and mobile *ad hoc* missions which operate in case of signalling by migrants or the police. The IOM's aim is to track migratory trends, not to provide precise numbers on transits.

123 For a detailed analysis of Italian migration policies in Niger see: C. González Enríquez, P. Lisa, A. S. Okyay, A. Palm, *Italian and Spanish approaches to external migration management in the Sahel*, IAI-Elcano paper, June 2018, http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/2018_elcano-iai.pdf.

124 The legislative process began in 2013 but was very lengthy because of the decentralised nature of the Nigerien government and few available resources. The law represents the transposition into national legislation of the Palermo Protocol and other related international conventions concerning human smuggling. Source: IOM Niger, *op. cit.*

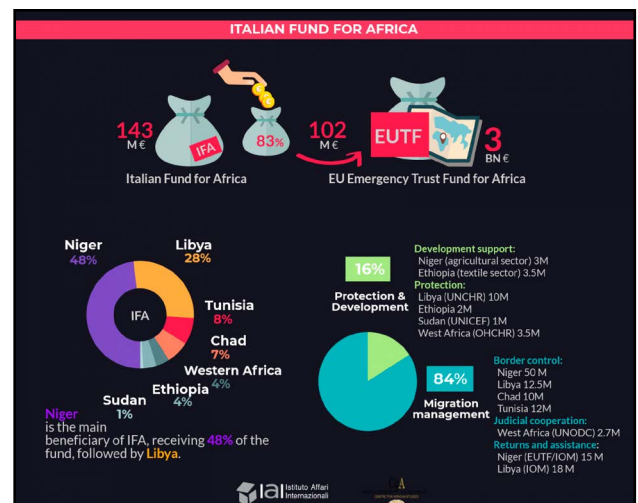
125 Italian Embassy, *op. cit.*

half of 2017, the IOM had already registered a stark decrease in transit migration, with around 5,500 monitored in transit per month.¹²⁶ These figures are nevertheless not exact and very conservative, as the IOM does not operate at night-time and its mobile monitoring teams are not able to cover the whole territory.¹²⁷ What can be affirmed with certainty is the decrease that has been registered in arrivals in Italy; nevertheless, this is to be attributed also (if not even mainly) to Italy's cooperation on migration management with Libya (analysed above).

Libya and Niger might have been the key partners, but they are not the only ones with which Italy has been working in its efforts to curb arrivals on its shores: cooperation on migration management with countries of origin and transit such as Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt have been, and are still being, reinforced, in addition to substantive efforts operated both by the EU and Italy in signing readmission agreements.¹²⁸ In order to finance such cooperation, €200 million was earmarked for 2017 for a brand new Italian Fund for Africa (IFA). For 2018, €85 million was earmarked: a substantive decrease, particularly as the 2018 share of €85 million includes €55 million that was allocated but not spent in 2017, making the new amount of funds only €30 million.¹²⁹ In 2017, Niger was the main beneficiary of the fund, having received 48%, mainly through the ADJUSEN project and an IOM-led project on voluntary returns.¹³⁰ There is a strong interconnection between the IFA and the above-mentioned EUTF, as 83% of the Italian contribution to the EUTF Africa originates from the Italian Fund for Africa,¹³¹ while certain projects financed by the EUTF are managed or implemented by AICS or Italy's Interior Ministry.

The Italian Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration (ASGI) recently challenged the Italian Fund for Africa before the regional administrative court (TAR) for a diversion of means for border control objectives. Indeed, whilst the ministerial decree of the Italian Fund for Africa¹³² expressly defines it as an instrument set to finance "initiatives

aimed at countering irregular migration and human trafficking", this stands in contrast with the founding law of the Fund, which refers more generically to "initiatives aimed at re-launching dialogue and cooperation with African countries of crucial importance for migratory routes".¹³³ Furthermore, when analysing the projects so far implemented under the Italian Fund for Africa, a strong predominance of initiatives aimed at the management of irregular entries (returns, border control capacity building, judicial cooperation) can be observed, totalling €120.2 million of the €143.3 million so far approved. Only the remaining €23 million is aimed at projects focusing exclusively on the protection of migrants and on development support.¹³⁴



Infographic developed by the author in collaboration with Luca Barana (Centre for African Studies). Updated as of February 2018.

126 IOM Niger, *op. cit.*

127 *Ibid.*

128 For a detailed analysis see S. Prestianni, *The dangerous link between migration, development and security for the externalisation of borders in Africa*, ARCI, July 2018, <https://www.arci.it/documento/the-dangerous-link-between-migration-development-and-security-for-the-externalisation-of-borders-in-africa-case-studies-on-sudan-niger-and-tunisia/>.

129 Risposta del sottosegretario Manlio Di Stefano all'interrogazione a risposta in commissione nr. 5-00445 di Lia Quartapelle Procopio, 24 ottobre 2018.

130 Risposta del sottosegretario Benedetto Della Vedova all'interrogazione 5-12104 Quartapelle Procopio: Sull'impiego del Fondo per l'Africa di cui all'articolo 1, comma 624, della legge 11 dicembre 2016, n. 232, 13 settembre 2017.

131 Interview with DG Europe MAECI, *op. cit.*

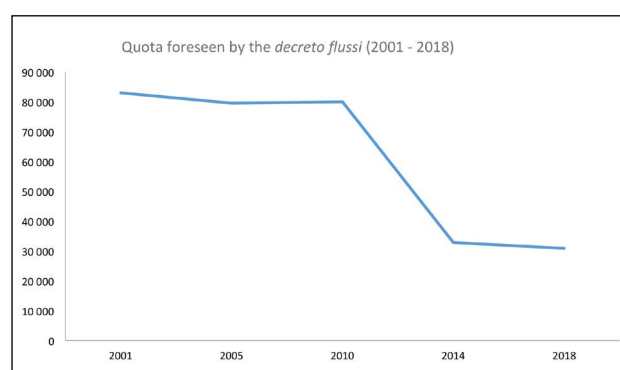
132 MAECI Decree 4110/47, August 2017. Asgi, Depositato il ricorso di ASGI contro lo sviamento di 2,5 milioni di euro dal c.d. Fondo Africa, November 2017, <https://www.asgi.it/?p=29135>.

133 Legge 11 dicembre 2016, n. 232, Bilancio di previsione dello Stato per l'anno finanziario 2017 e bilancio pluriennale per il triennio 2017-2019.

134 Risposta del sottosegretario Benedetto Della Vedova, *op. cit.*

The IFA is additional to Italy's Official Development Assistance (ODA), which has been increasing steadily since 2012, reaching €4.4 billion in 2016. The goal is stated to be a further increase over the coming years, in order to reach 0.30% by 2020.¹³⁵ However, a substantive part of this increase is also due to the incorporation in the overall amount of the expenses disbursed on the reception of refugees inside Italy, amounting to 34.3% of its ODA.¹³⁶ Additionally, decisions on the volume of aid, its geographical allocation and spending modalities are heavily influenced by the increase in migration flows.¹³⁷ In fact, the three-year programming and policy planning document of the Italian MFA for the years 2016-2018 streamlined migration into all initiatives, recognising that the subject of employment in Africa has to be considered as an absolute priority and tackled through different programmes and with the help of various actors.¹³⁸ Italy's ODA to Africa, while representing only 1% of overall contributions to Africa by Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries, constitutes 55% of Italy's total aid disbursements, further confirming its centrality. The spending is focused on the North African region (with particular attention to Tunisia, Egypt, Libya) and the Sahel, and on projects fighting the root causes of migration, such as by creating greater economic and employment opportunities in countries of origin and transit. Italy has furthermore long advocated private investment projects and innovative financing,¹³⁹ as well as supporting the creation of the European External Investment Plan (EEIP) which is expected to leverage more than €44 billion by 2020.

In line with the EU's trend of focusing efforts mainly on reducing inflows, little attention in Italy has been dedicated to creating regular access channels. Indeed since the 2014 spike in arrivals in Italy, the number of work permits issued to non-EU citizens under the decreto flussi ('flow decree') has decreased by more than 60%.



Source: Data from the Italian Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

As far as access channels for protection-seekers are concerned, Italy contributes to the EU resettlement scheme, with 1,989 places pledged and 1,612 resettled as of March 2018. An interesting case is represented by the humanitarian corridors, a public-private partnership project, where the economic burden is shouldered by religious organisations. The first memorandum of understanding foreseeing the so-called corridoi umanitari ('humanitarian corridors') was signed in December 2015 between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Interior Ministry, the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Evangelic Churches Federation and the Waldensian Church. The agreement foresaw the granting of humanitarian visas to 1,000 people in vulnerable conditions from Lebanon to Italy over a two-year period. While the institutions are involved in the security clearance and visa-provision processes, the religious entities operate the selection process and entirely finance travel arrangements, as well as reception once beneficiaries arrive in Italy.¹⁴⁰ Due to the success of this first agreement, as well as replication of this agreement for Lebanon for a further 1,000 places,¹⁴¹ an additional memorandum was signed in January 2017 to open a humanitarian corridor from Ethiopia to Italy

¹³⁵ Concord Europe, *Aid Watch Report 2017: EU Aid Uncovered*, October 2017, https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CONCORD_AidWatch_Report_2017_web.pdf.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ AICS, *op. cit.*

¹³⁸ Italian MFA, *Three-year Programming and Policy Planning Document 2016-2018*, March 2018.

¹³⁹ Migration Compact, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁰ D. Candura (Italian Ministry of Interior), *Emerging Private Sponsorship Programmes in Europe: a new partnership between government and local communities: Italy Case Study*, Presentation at the ERN Webinar, February 2017, http://resettlement.eu/sites/icmc.ttp.eu/files/Humanitarian%20Corridors%20Italy_Donatella%20Candura_MOI%20Italy_Feb%202017.pdf.

¹⁴¹ L. Liverani, *Corridoi umanitari. Firmato al Viminale l'accordo per altri mille profughi siriani*, *Avvenire*, November 2017, <https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/corridoi-umanitari-firmato-al-viminale-l'accordo-per-salvare-altri-mille-profughi-siriani>.

for 500 individuals.¹⁴² This model is now being implemented also in other EU member states. Italy also supports the UNHCR Emergency Transit mechanism, which provides for the evacuation of vulnerable individuals from Libya to Niger (for subsequent resettlement) or to EU member states directly: 312 individuals were evacuated directly from Tripoli to Rome under the previous Italian government in the context of an exceptional programme similar to the humanitarian corridors, while future transfers will take the nature of resettlements, for which Italy has pledged 1,000 places under the 2018 Central Mediterranean Route resettlement programme.¹⁴³

Although the Gentiloni government succeeded in strongly reducing arrivals in Italy through the above-mentioned measures, it did not manage to soothe a public opinion increasingly influenced by an electoral campaign that pictured migration as the one and only important issue for Italy.¹⁴⁴ This also had a heavy influence on Italy's vision of the EU: all Italian governments in power over the last three years had criticised the EU for its lack of engagement, and had repeatedly called for greater political and financial support from all the EU member states.¹⁴⁵ In fact, the poor implementation of the relocation system and the deadlock in the negotiations concerning the Dublin reform are testimony to Italy's difficulties in fostering agreement among member states on ways of shouldering the responsibility together.

Since the formation of the new government in early June 2018, tensions have been rising even more inside Italy, and in other EU member states, with regard to the EU institutions. Debates at the EU level were particularly heated during summer 2018. These debates were triggered by Italy's refusal to allow access to Italian ports for the NGO ships Aquarius and Proactiva Open Arms, but also by a

quarrel between Italy and France. Despite Prime Minister Conte's announcement that the Italian proposal to the June 28 summit of the European Council would completely reverse the status quo of existing EU migration policies, the conclusions can hardly be said to reflect Italy's requests to turn talks on solidarity into action, as the thorny Dublin issue has been postponed, and the main approach is identified in the voluntary nature of member state commitments.¹⁴⁶ However, it is undeniable that the current Italian government has taken a much harder stance on migration policies, as is demonstrated by the adoption of the decreto immigrazione and the withdrawal from the Global Compact. But it is particularly in the language used by the government that a strong shift can be noted, carrying consequences also for the relationship between Italy and other EU member states. Hard statements were made by Italy following the latest quarrel over the docking of the vessel Diciotti, with Italy declaring that the other EU member states' reticence to engage in the allocation of the migrants on board the vessel represents "yet another demonstration that Europe does not exist", having "turned its back once again on Italy", and threatening that as a consequence Italy would cut its contributions to the EU.¹⁴⁷ It is still to be seen if these statements will be followed by actions, with possible consequences for Italy's current strong involvement in EU initiatives. Italy currently participates in EU civilian and military operations (as analysed in the section below), and it is an important economic contributor, being the second strongest supporter of the EUTF, with €110 million pledged and €108 million disbursed by late August 2018.¹⁴⁸ So far, the threats to cut Italy's contributions to EU funds seem to have been merely empty talk.¹⁴⁹ However, it remains difficult to make predictions about future developments, as the new government has called traditional alliances into question, and formed a front with countries such as Hungary, which have always advocated

142 This second corridor is financed by the Community of Sant'Egidio and Caritas/Bishops Conference and implemented in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Interior and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

143 European Resettlement Network, Italy, <http://resettlement.eu/country/italy>.

144 Palm, *Leading the Way? Italy's External Migration Policies and the 2018 Elections: An Uncertain Future*, *op. cit.*

145 MAECI, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean*, *op. cit.*

146 A. Palm, *EU and immigration: still a power game with no winners*, Aspenia Online, July 2018,

<http://www.aspeninstitute.it/aspenia-online/article/eu-and-immigration-still-power-game-no-winners>.

147 Il Messaggero, Diciotti, no della Ue all'Italia. Il governo: ritorsione sui fondi, August 2018, https://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/politica/nave_diciotti_ultime_notizie_di_maio_salvini_ue-3931100.html.

148 Only Germany, with its €157.5 million pledged and €139.5 million disbursed, comes before. Other countries that are key players in the region such as France and Spain are not close in their EUTF commitments (only €9 million each).

European Commission, *EU MS and other donors contributions*, https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/eueta/files/contributions_website_4.pdf [last updated on 21 August 2018].

149 La Stampa, Dopo le minacce, l'Italia versa (in anticipo) i soldi all'Ue: "Pagata regolarmente la quota mensile al bilancio", August 2018, <http://www.lastampa.it/2018/09/04/economia/dopo-le-minacce-litalia-versa-in-anticipo-i-soldi-allue-pagata-regolarmente-la-quota-mensile-al-bilancio-JE6gTtuboMSoj7mfeA6dXl/pagina.html>.

approaches completely opposed to Italian interests, such as refusing a Dublin reform aimed at establishing mandatory responsibility-sharing mechanisms among EU member states.

2.2.4 Italian and European missions in the Central Mediterranean

In the Mediterranean, Italy is engaged both in EU and international missions, and in national initiatives. In 2013, following the dramatic shipwreck off the coast of Lampedusa, Italy launched its Mare Nostrum sea operation, which ran until October 2014, and had the primary goal of saving lives at sea and providing humanitarian assistance. In its one year of existence, the total cost of the mission for Italy has been estimated at €114 million,¹⁵⁰ and it succeeded in providing assistance to over 150,000 migrants.¹⁵¹ In 2014, Italy put an end to Mare Nostrum, which had been devised as an emergency response to the Lampedusa drownings, and it called for greater involvement from other EU member states with the aim of having a European operation to control the EU's external borders, and reducing Italy's financial engagement.¹⁵² The FRONTEX-managed Triton and the CSDP mission EUNAVFOR MED Sophia were consequently launched, partly replacing Mare Nostrum, but involving reduced

engagement and a smaller operational area. Despite search and rescue not being the primary objective, as these two operations focus on border management (Triton) and the disruption of smuggling and trafficking networks (Sophia), SAR inevitably became a major activity in both, given that the prevention of loss of life at sea is an obligation under international maritime law. While Triton was substituted by Operation Themis in February 2018, which has an even smaller operational area and a new law enforcement focus,¹⁵³ Sophia was set to expire at the end of 2018 and was therefore under re-discussion due to pressure from the new Italian government to change its mandate. In fact, after the 28 June 2018 European Council meeting, whose conclusions

name the principle of 'shared responsibility', the government notified the other EU member states that "the provisions presently contained in the 'operating plan' of the EUNAVFOR Med Sophia operation are no longer deemed to be applicable as they identify Italy as the only place to disembark the migrants rescued by its units".¹⁵⁴ Italy instead proposed a rotation principle for the disembarkation points among Mediterranean states.

In fact, in the Italian vision, the Dublin criteria of the country of first arrival should not be applied in the case of people arriving on official vessels following a SAR activity, as this does not represent an act of irregular entry to the EU.¹⁵⁵ No consensus has yet been found between EU member states on this proposal, which is currently impeding the

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All Italian governments in power over the last three years had criticised the EU for its lack of engagement, and had repeatedly called for greater political and financial support from all the EU member states.
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150 Ministero dell'Interno, *Si conclude 'Mare Nostrum', al via 'Triton'*, October 2014, <http://www.interno.gov.it/it/node/2166>.

151 Ministero della Difesa, *Operazione Mare Nostrum*, <http://www.marina.difesa.it/cosa-facciamo/operazioni-in-corso/Documents/Dati%20statistici%20Mare%20Nostrum.pdf>

152 Senato della Repubblica, *Intervento del Ministro dell'Interno Angelino Alfano al question time*, 30 October 2014, <http://briguglio.asgi.it/immigrazione-e-asilo/2014/novembre/question-time-alfano-sen-30-10-2014.pdf>.

153 Frontex, *Operation Themis*, consulted on 11 September 2018, <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/main-operations/operation-themis-italy/>.

154 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *EUNAVFOR Med Sophia operation: Italy's position on the provisions relative to the port of disembarkation contained in the "operating plan"*, July 2018, https://www.esteri.it/mae/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/eunavformed-sophia-posizione-italiana-sulle-disposizioni-sui-porti-di-sbarco-del-piano-operativo.html.

155 Representative of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IAI Migration management course, 10-14 September 2018.

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*Two major trends
can be observed in the
Mediterranean Sea over
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renewal of the mandate of the operation. As an interim solution, in December the Council extended the mandate until 31 March 2019.

Two major trends can be observed in the Mediterranean Sea over recent years: first, a restriction of SAR operations in the Central Mediterranean, and second, a progressive militarisation of external migration policies. The clampdown that has been operated on NGO initiatives in the Mediterranean Sea since summer 2017 has substantially changed the SAR scenario: the ten NGOs which had deployed ships in the Central Mediterranean since mid-2015 in coordination with the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, performed up to 40% of the rescues in 2017;¹⁵⁶ this percentage had fallen to 9% in June 2018.¹⁵⁷ This was a consequence of the hostile climate and numerous efforts to impose limitations on NGO operations – a climate that was initiated by allegations concerning the ‘push factor’ created by the NGOs’ presence in the Mediterranean, and the NGOs’ alleged involvement with smuggling networks. These allegations triggered parliamentary inquiries and investigative activities by Italian prosecutors,¹⁵⁸ which culminated in the NGO ‘Code of Conduct’ being adopted by the Italian government in July 2017, after the Council gave its green light to the “Action plan on Measures to Support Italy, reduce pressure along the Central Mediterranean route and increase solidarity”. Some of the controversial aspects of the code are the determination that NGOs should not enter Libyan territorial waters to operate SAR unless under previous authorisation and under exceptional circumstances; the obligation not to transfer those on rescued vessels to other boats, but to disembark them; and the obligation to receive judicial police officers on board, when requested to do so.¹⁵⁹ After some of the NGOs refused to sign the code, investigations were launched (but very quickly dropped) against the vessels Jugend Rettet, Sea Watch and Proactiva Open Arms, with some of these investigations including the seizure of some of the ships.¹⁶⁰ With the new government, NGO vessels and also an Italian coastguard ship were denied permission to dock in Italian ports in a quarrel with other EU member states over sharing the migrants among them once disembarked. While the recent Diciotti case has cost Interior Minister Salvini a formal investigation for the

156 Guardia Costiera, *Attività S.A.R. (Search and Rescue) nel Mediterraneo Centrale*, December 2017, http://www.guardiacostiera.gov.it/attivita/Documents/attivita-sar-immigrazione-2017/Rapporto_annuale_2017_ITA.pdf.

157 Guardia Costiera, *Attività S.A.R. (Search and Rescue) nel Mediterraneo Centrale*, June 2018, <http://www.guardiacostiera.gov.it/attivita/Documents/attivita-sar-immigrazione-2018/Giu.%20ITA.pdf>.

158 For an overview see Forensic Oceanography, *Blaming the Rescuers: Criminalising Solidarity, Re-Enforcing Deterrence*, <https://blamingtherescuers.org>.

159 E. Cusumano, *Straightjacketing migrant rescuers? The code of conduct on maritime NGOs*, Mediterranean Politics, 2017.

160 N. Scavo, *Un anno dopo cadute le accuse di legami tra Ong e scafisti*, Avvenire, August 2018, <https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/un-anno-dopo-svanisce-il-patto-trafficking>.

detention of the migrants on board,¹⁶¹ his objective of “zero NGOs” seems to have worked because since the end of August 2018, no or very few NGO ships operate regularly in the Central Mediterranean.¹⁶² If this is seen together with the increased role of the LCG and the spike in the death rate (analysed above), an inevitable conclusion is that progressively fewer people attempting the crossing are brought to safety and that their lives are being put at risk.

The increasing predominance of security and military policies in countries along the Central Mediterranean Route has been described by some as a “militarisation of externalisation”.¹⁶³ Experts have criticised the benefits this carries for a set of stakeholders such as security companies and arms manufacturers, the prominent role this gives to security actors, and the limited benefits it seems to carry for the broader security and stability in the regional setting, potentially disrupting economic and social structures contributing to political balances.¹⁶⁴ In fact, migration-management objectives seem often to have been prioritised over the broader foreign policy objective of stability and resilience. The aim of curbing flows has also been an important determinant in Italy’s re-orientation and concentration of military efforts in key transit countries – namely in Libya, with the 2018 *Missione bilaterale di assistenza e supporto in Libia* (MIASIT) operation, in which the tasks from *Mare Sicuro* (training of the Libyan “coastguard”) and *Operazione Ippocrate* converge; and in Niger, with the *Missione bilaterale di supporto nella Repubblica del Niger* (MISIN) mission, which was meant to be 480-man strong by the end of 2018. These are all efforts that are additional to the European CSDP missions already present in these countries (analysed in the previous chapter).

¹⁶¹ *Matteo Salvini formally investigated over migrant ship standoff*, The Guardian, August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/25/matteo-salvini-formally-investigated-over-migrant-ship-standoff>.

¹⁶² *No NGO rescue boats currently in central Mediterranean, agencies warn*, The Guardian, September 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/12/migrant-rescue-ships-mediterranean?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other.

¹⁶³ Prestianni, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁴ A. E. Ursu, *The Italian Military Deployment*, Clingendael Institute – Opinion, January 2018, <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/italian-military-deployment>.

CONCLUSIONS

This report has analysed Italy's foreign policy projection in the Mediterranean, responding to two main research questions: first, Italy's positioning choices between engagement within the EU (and multilateral) frameworks and (strategic) autonomy, and second, the configuration of foreign policy preferences, with multi-thematic approaches being advocated but with the need to respond to the salience of the issue of migration increasingly driving its foreign policy choices. In responding to these two questions, this report has also looked at how the priority of managing irregular migration flows has been implemented in practice.

The first part of this report, which analyses Italy's role in the Mediterranean, draws three main considerations, which are supported by two case studies on Libya and Egypt. The first consideration is how the partial re-orientation of Italy's foreign policy projection towards North Africa, the Sahel, and Africa has led to Italy's even greater anchoring into its traditional geographical area of reference. In this respect, Libya and Egypt represent two constants of Italy's foreign policy in the Mediterranean despite the ups and downs. The second consideration is how Italy's relations to the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries have always been driven by a number of factors (related to the economy, trade patterns, security, the promotion of certain values and principles, the cooperation with governments, the fostering of business-to-business relations, migration management, the promotion of cultural cooperation), thus leading to the sort of holistic approach that is a defining feature of Italy's foreign policy. The third consideration is how Italy's behaviour in the context of the EU's policies on the wider Mediterranean is mainly informed by a push for multilateralism. It is evident that where there is no clear and unified European position, Italy has engaged in competition (and sometimes quarrels) with other European countries to defend its own interests, as the case of the recent Libya policy demonstrates. By contrast, however, when a stronger European stance exists – as was the case of the Euro-Mediterranean frameworks of cooperation – Italy has traditionally been one of the strongest advocates of multilateral and cooperative engagement in foreign policy. Such multilateral and cooperative frameworks have traditionally been the main avenue for Italy to pursue its interests as a middle power that does not possess the hard or the soft power to go it alone.

A number of developments in the Mediterranean countries themselves and the ever-growing focus on migration management, analysed in the second section of this report, have had an impact on all three considerations. These developments have contributed to a re-shaping of the geographic area of interest by driving countries of origin and transit high up on the political agenda. They have also jeopardised the holistic approach, which has been seen as detrimental to the pursuit of Italy's more stringent interests as defined by the government with regard to public opinion. The turn to a Realpolitik approach in both Libya and Egypt discussed in the first part of this report is not peculiar to these two cases alone, but the cases of Libya and Egypt are certainly illustrative of a broader trend in Italy's foreign policy on the Mediterranean, as also shown by the bilateral relations between Italy and Turkey or the countries of the GCC. Lastly, the trend in favour of multilateralism has increasingly been abandoned by Italy, particularly when dealing with the management of migration flows, as the recent decision against support for the Global Compact demonstrates.

When looking at implementation of the priority of managing irregular migration on its shores, if Italy's aim is still to be the promoter of an approach that balances solidarity and security, the inevitable and bitter conclusion is that it most certainly has not succeeded. In fact, solidarity, which in the definition of the Italian MFA means "being a committed country from a humanitarian perspective, by saving many lives at sea and protecting individual rights",¹⁶⁵ has clearly been downgraded to a secondary objective, and is now outweighed by security concerns. This is reflected not only in the external policy trend of recent years, which has focused on the containment of flows elsewhere together with a limit on the rescue of those who succeed in departing without being intercepted, but also in national policies which restrict access to international protection and aim at a sharp increase in returns. In this regard, it should also be kept in mind that it is not the mere transfer of border control operations to third countries outside the European territory that determines an absence of responsibility for the financiers and supporters of these actions. In the case of Libya, it could be argued that because the LCG is trained, equipped and funded by Italy, Italy is liable as an assisting state on the basis of the rule for state complicity (Article 16 of the ILC Draft Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts). There is indeed not only the knowledge and consensus on Italy's side regarding the actions to be taken by the LCG, but the fact

165 MAECI, *The Italian Strategy in the Mediterranean*, *op. cit.*

that these acts also result in breaches of international refugee and human rights obligations that Italy is bound to respect.

Italy's situation is certainly not an easy one, being caught between complex relationships with third countries, the insufficiency of EU support, and the international obligations it is required to respect. However, if border control and migration management are understandable objectives, and indeed crucial for ensuring internal security, these cannot come at the cost of fundamental rights. In order not to be in breach of international and European law, the externalisation of migration management beyond the EU's borders must go hand in hand with the externalisation of certain forms of access to both international protection and legal labour migration channels. It is particularly in light of the current low number of arrivals, which now stand at merely 13% of the 2016 arrivals,¹⁶⁶ that concrete steps on regular access channels (much advocated by the current government, particularly the Five Star Movement) should be taken. Otherwise, it has to be acknowledged that the objective of solidarity has got lost on the way.

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The increasing predominance of security and military policies in countries along the Central Mediterranean Route has been described by some as a militarisation of externalisation.

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¹⁶⁶ Ministero dell'Interno, *Cruscotto statistico giornaliero*, 30 November 2018.

The Mediterranean has always represented a main source of opportunities and challenges for Italy's domestic and foreign policy. This strategic importance has also stemmed from the role that this region played in the construction and integration process of the European Union. The fact that both regions in the north and south of the Mediterranean Sea are currently experiencing deep internal crises does not diminish the importance of this geopolitical space and the EU's resolution to project its influence over it. This report addresses the broad topic of 'Italy in the Mediterranean' in order to shed light on the drivers, priorities and concrete actions Italy has pursued vis-à-vis this region in the period 2016-2018. It argues that domestic and geopolitical changes as well as the lack of cohesion and solidarity among EU member states on specific issues, particularly migration, have been responsible for some important changes that have occurred in Italy's Mediterranean approaches.



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