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THE DE-SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION AND BORDER  
MANAGEMENT IN ITALY

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Italian border and migration management is rooted in the migration-security nexus. Discursive and non-discursive practices performed by the Italian political élite have shifted migration from a non-political topic, to a politicized one, to a security issue. However, securitizing narratives and border processes have proven insufficient for an efficient migration management which complies with migrants' human rights. After a theoretical overview on securitization, de-securitization and the position of the Italian migration governance in the security theory, this thesis will attempt to disarticulate the migration-security nexus in Italy. Alternatives to the current securitization of migration will be proposed to bring migration back in the political sphere, thus dismantling the Self-Other binomial. By adopting the Autonomy of Migration approach, the thesis will investigate the potential of the humanitarian and political borderwork performed by non-governmental actors in Sicily and of migrants' collective resistance at the local level to achieve a de-securitized migration management. Counter-discourses and practices performed by actors of the solidarity sector, together with acts of citizenship performed by non-citizens – immigrants – destabilize, in fact, the security truth upheld by securitizing actors. However, for de-securitization to be effective, a tangible change in securitizing dynamics is required. A series of policy recommendations, aimed at achieving a human mobility in security and at enhancing the intercultural integration of immigrants will be addressed to Italy to restore the rule of law in the migration governance for the benefit of both: migrants and local communities.

**KEYWORDS:** migration-security nexus, de-securitization, borders, migration, human mobility, citizenship

## RÉSUMÉ

La gestion des frontières et de l'immigration en Italie découle du binôme migration-sécurité. À travers des pratiques discursives et non discursives mises en œuvre par l'élite politique italienne, la migration a été transformée d'un sujet non politique à un sujet politisé, puis à une question de sécurité. Cependant, les narrations sécuritaires et les processus frontaliers se sont avérés insuffisants pour une gestion efficace de la migration dans le respect des droits de l'homme des migrants. Après un exposé théorique sur la sécurisation, la dé-sécurisation et la position de la gouvernance migratoire italienne dans la théorie de la sécurité, ce mémoire vise à désarticuler le lien entre la migration et la sécurité en Italie. Des alternatives à la sécurisation actuelle de la migration seront proposées pour réintégrer la migration dans la sphère politique, déstructurant ainsi la distinction « ami-ennemi ». En adoptant l'approche de l'Autonomie de la Migration, ce mémoire étudiera le potentiel du travail frontalier humanitaire et politique réalisé par les acteurs non gouvernementaux en Sicile et de la résistance collective des migrants au niveau local pour parvenir à une gestion de la migration dé-sécurisée. Les contre-discours et les pratiques des acteurs du secteur de la solidarité, ainsi que les actes de citoyenneté exercés par les non-citoyens – les immigrés – déstabilisent la vérité sécuritaire mise en avant par les acteurs de la sécurisation. Cependant, pour que la dé-sécurisation soit efficace, un renversement tangible des dynamiques sécurisantes est nécessaire. Un ensemble de recommandations politiques visant à réaliser une mobilité humaine en toute sécurité et à renforcer l'intégration interculturelle des immigrés sera adressé à l'Italie, afin de restaurer l'État de droit dans la gouvernance de la migration, au bénéfice des migrants et des communautés locales.

**MOTS CLÉS :** binôme migration-sécurité, dé-sécurisation, frontières, migration, mobilité humaine, citoyenneté



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## TABLE OF ACRONYMS

<b>Abbreviation:</b>	<b>Definition:</b>
CARA	<i>Centro di Accoglienza per i Richiedenti Asilo</i> [Asylum Seekers Reception Centre]
CAS	<i>Centro di Accoglienza Straordinaria</i> [Extraordinary Reception Centre]
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CEFR	Common European Framework for Reference Language
CIE	<i>Centro di Identificazione e Espulsione</i> [Identification and Expulsion Centre]
COE	Council of Europe
COM	Communication (European Commission)
CPR	<i>Centro per il Rimpatrio</i> [Return Detention Centre]
CPT	<i>Centro di Permanenza Temporanea</i> [Temporary Detention Centre]
CS	Copenhagen School
CSS	Critical Security Studies
D.l.	Decree Law
D.leg.	Legislative Decree
ECHR	European Convention of Human Rights
EU	European Union
FRONTEX	European Border and Coast Guard

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PS	Paris School
SAR	Search and Rescue
UNHCR	United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees
UPR	Universal Periodic Review



## INTRODUCTION

The ongoing securitization of migration, that is the placement of one issue, in this case migration, in the field of security by “presenting it as an existential threat requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedures (Buzan *et al*, 1998, p. 24) entails alarming drawbacks in terms of the human security of migrants. In 2023, out of 150,000 people disembarked in Italy 2000 are dead or missing (UNHCR, 2024). Migrants experience constant violations of their human rights, which are not only protected at the national level but also by regional and international hard law instruments. Indirect refoulements, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, inhumane and degrading treatments, collective expulsions of aliens occur at the borders of Europe (and Italy), as evidenced, *inter alia*, by the recent affair of J.A. and others v. Italy brought before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), or by ruling 4557/2024 of the Italian Court of Cassation concerning the handing over of migrants to Libya. Moreover, although borders are the primary *locus* where consequences of securitization materialize, the emergency-based and securitizing Italian migration governance has negative externalities also on subsequent phases of the migratory journey, which culminates with the naturalization of the immigrant. In Italy, the integration of long-term international migrants reveals, in fact, numerous deficiencies.

The erosion of the rule of law in the European and Italian migration and border management, prompted me to mobilize for the human rights of international migrants – a term understood here in its most extensive conception, referring to any individual who leaves his or her place of habitual residence and crosses an international border (IOM, n.d.). However, despite my engagement in local activism, and my study of migration and border issues, also within specific programmes, as a postgraduate Summer School I attended on Lesbos (EL) on migration and borders, I have never considered, prior to the present thesis, associating the vulnerabilities migrants are subjected to with the process of securitization of migration. My attention to the migration-security nexus arose after my internship at Eurac Research – Institute for Minority Rights (Bolzano, Italy), in Summer 2023. In fact, although I was not part of the project dealing with it, i.e., SECUREU – The Securitization of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities and the Rise of Xenophobia in the EU, I came across some publications and had exchanges with

researchers who were part of this project. There is where I first heard the term “de-securitization”: the reverse process of securitization, the shifting of one issue, migration, from the security realm back to the political one, that is out of “emergency mode and into the normal bargaining process of the political sphere” (Buzan *et al*, p. 4). I started to do research on critical security studies and on the de-securitization theory applied to migration and became passionate about it. Consequently, embracing the postulates of critical security theories and understanding the negative repercussions of the securitization process, not only at the borders, but also within the society, such as the deriving radicalisation and polarisation of it, I conceived the idea of investigating alternatives to it and achieving a de-securitized migration and border management. Such a research project meets both my need to fight for migrants’ rights, advocating against state violence, and my academic interests. Moreover, this research has the ambition to enrich the existing, but still moderate, literature on the de-securitization of migration and to serve as a blueprint for policymakers.

Positioned within critical security studies and in order to investigate the possibilities to bring migration back into the political sphere, the present research blends insights from critical migration, border and citizenship studies. It also seeks to overcome the methodological nationalism which is often intrinsic to the study of migration-related issues by adopting the approach of the Autonomy of Migration, thus attempting to conceive the management of human mobility from the migrants’ point of view, knowledge and practices, considering migration as a social movement and altering “the perspective from which to view the ‘politics of mobility’” (Mezzadra, 2011, p. 1).

To decode the process of securitization of migration in Italy – and more generally in the EU – and the *ratio* behind it, a historical *excursus* on the governance of migration and borders in Italy will be provided. The ensemble of legislative acts governing migration will be employed as primary sources and, beyond the relevant scientific literature, non-governmental organisations’ shadow reports, statements by the Italian political élite, and media sources – such as newspaper articles – will be used as secondary sources. Moreover, to analyse the levels of vulnerability experienced by migrants, in terms of human rights violations, United Nations Treaty Bodies reports, together with non-governmental sources and the jurisprudence of national – the Italian Constitutional Court, the Italian Court of Cassation and other inferior courts – and European – the

European Court of Human Rights – courts will be employed. In Part 2 of the present thesis, in order to explore the possibilities of undoing the securitization process and performing de-securitization, data will also be collected from interviews with actors of the solidarity sector: the Palermo team of the German NGO Borderline Europe and the Italian association *Città Migrante* [Migrant City]. Exchanges with these two actors, the former active at the border and the second working for immigrants' inclusion into the *polity*, will be decisive for the formulation of policy recommendations. Moreover, the processing of the collected data will be carried out drawing on the Council of Europe's framework on intercultural integration at the national and local levels developed in 2021 (CoE, 2021), in order to transform them into actionable insights. However, the collection of sources for the present thesis was not without difficulties. Firstly, as the research is very topical – historically positioned after the establishment of the Meloni Government, in October 2022 – I was confronted with an enormous scarcity of (national) governmental sources. The various statistical and economic indicators, as well as the (internet) portals of the various ministries, such as that of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, responsible for integration policies in Italy, have not been updated since 2019/2020. This lack of information, although to a lesser extent, characterizes previous periods as well. Another difficulty I encountered was the interview process with the various non-governmental actors. Despite the willingness of many contacted associations to be interviewed, time constraints prevented these exchanges, as they were overloaded with work. However, both these difficulties are not merely accidental but are themselves indicators of the (poor) quality of institutional migration management in Italy.

With the elaboration of possibilities to de-securitize migration in the Italian context as the ultimate goal, Part 1 of the present thesis will deal with the securitization theory, the institutionalization of the migration-security nexus, and the limits of this process. Part 2, instead, will be dedicated to the process of achieving de-securitization at borders and within local host communities. More precisely, Chapter 1 illustrates security theory and introduces the role of de-securitization as a constituent of security itself. Chapter 2 will focus on Italy, as a case study, analysing the historical and political framing of Italian migration legislation and placing the Italian migration governance in the security theory. Chapter 3 will advance proposals to de-securitize Italian border processes, drawing on the humanitarian and political borderwork of actors of the



solidarity sector operating in Sicily – Italy’s border area within the Central Mediterranean Route. Chapter 4 will investigate the transformative potential of immigrants, qualifying them as the agency to counter the securitization process and its impact on integration.

# **PART 1 – THE SECURITIZATION THEORY AND THE ITALIAN MIGRATION-SECURITY NEXUS. CONCEPTS AND LIMITS**

## **Chapter 1 - The security theory and the role of de-securitization as a constituent of security itself**

### *Section 1.1 – Conceptual background: migration in the security theory*

#### 1.1.1 – Defining the concept of security. From the essence of security to its function

Security has been outlined by many scholars as an “essentially contested topic”. Following Scholar W.B. Gallie (1959) an “essentially contested concept” is a concept “that admits of no one authoritative definition, because it is essentially the focus of different accounts, especially different moral attitudes” (Calhoun, C. 2002). Despite the ontological debate surrounding security, a shared consensus can be ascertained concerning the understanding of security as: the absence of threat to a certain object, to an acquired value (Wolfers, 1952, p. 485). In the field of international relations, although the concept of security underpins the very birth of the international society, conventionally identified in the peace of Westphalia 1648, international security studies (ISS) emerged in the period of bipolarism and decolonization. Security corresponds to “the absence of acute threats to the minimal acceptable levels of the basic values that a people consider essential to its survival [...]” (Krause & Nye, 1975, p. 330) and to “a low probability of damage to acquired value” (Baldwin, 1997, p. 13). The latter is still the most widely accepted definition in the field of international relations. However, given this theoretical outline, the following questions arise automatically: security for whom? security from what? security by what means? security through which actors? Before trying to answer those questions, a brief historical overview of the evolution of the concept of security is crucial.

Originally, as postulated by the realist theory of international relations, in the Westphalian sovereign state system, states were power and security maximisers

struggling for their survival in a brutal, anarchic international arena. Therefore, in this system dominated by the “security dilemma”<sup>2</sup>, security was conceived as a national security, a precondition for the existence of the state itself, achievable through the continuous pursuit of the balance of power to oppose hegemony. Accordingly, sovereignty and territorial integrity needed protection from external threats, of a military nature. However, in the 1960s, with the escalation of the military confrontation between the two superpowers – the US and the USSR –, the 1962 Cuban crisis, and due to the proliferation of proxy wars, the Vietnam war 1955-1975, the Angolan civil war 1975-2002 *inter alia*, the traditional understanding of security based on the military threat became increasingly outdated. Threats of political, social, environmental, economic nature began to become tangible, and the focus started to shift on the human being: “people find themselves embedded in a human environment without unavoidable social, economic, and political consequences” (Buzan, 1983). This led, along with the fall of bipolarism and the rise of regionalisms, transnational- and non-governmental actors, to the birth of Critical Security Studies (CSS), a critical international relation theory. CSS consists in several scholarships, as the Welsh School, the Copenhagen School, the Paris School *inter alia*, and, despite the divergent assumptions among the different Schools, they all advocate for a social constructivist approach to security. In fact, they reject the mainstream positivist theories, mainly the realist one, to security and they all build around the premise that security is a social construct in Coxian terms<sup>3</sup>. Security is, indeed, situational. As Scholar McDonald argues, three main postulates underpin CSS: (1) the rejection of the traditional realist approach to security, too narrow and simplistic, (2) the politics of security, *id est* “the function of representations or discourses of security in defining group identity, enabling particular policy or legitimating particular actors as security providers”, and (3) the ethics of security (Browning & McDonald, 2013, pp. 235-255). A punctual analysis of politics and ethics is a prerequisite to understand security. Furthermore, alongside with the development of CSS, another factor contributes to the evolution of the security concept, discrediting even more the traditional “national

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<sup>2</sup> In political science, a situation in which actions taken by a state to increase its own security cause reactions from other states, which in turn lead to a decrease rather than an increase in the original state security (Britannica, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup>For further information look, *inter alia*: Klarlund, S. E., (1994). “The origins of racism: the critical theory of Oliver C. Cox”, *Mid-American Review of Sociology*, 18(1/2), 85–92.

security”: the emergence of what is now commonly referred to as “human security”. This new approach to national and international security, developed by the United Nation Development Program (UNDP) in 1994, notably expands the traditional notion of security, placing at its centre the human being. In fact, “human security” encompasses “human rights, good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfil his or her potential” (Annan, 2000). Thus, poverty reduction, economic growth, conflict prevention, together with the “freedom from want, freedom from fear and the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment are the interrelated building blocks of human – and therefore national – security” (*Ibid.*).

Therefore, referring now to the previously asked questions concerning the subjects, objects, threats and means of security, it seems, at present, neither possible nor meaningful to provide an *a priori* answer. No fixed definition of security will be consistent with its social nature totally dependent on the socio-political landscape. Thus, instead of focusing on the essence of security in ontological terms – its definition – it seems more appropriate, to endorse a constructivist approach, to reflect on what security does, *id est*, on “securitization” (Von Boemcken & Schetter, 2016). The Copenhagen School of CSS frames security as a “particular type of politics to a wide range of issues” (Buzan *et al.*, 1998), thus shifting the focus on what security does, on securitization.

### 1.1.2 – The Copenhagen School securitization theory: actors, referent object, relevant audience, extraordinary measures.

The Copenhagen School (CS), inaugurated and developed in the 1990s, around the Conflict and Peace Research Institute (COPRI) based in Copenhagen, rejects the conceptualization of security as an objective condition. Security is, in fact, defined as “the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics” (Buzan *et al.* 1998, p. 23). This dynamic definition of security, associating it to a move, leads to the assumption that security is a process, and this process is precisely what the CS identifies with the term “securitization”. Consequently, securitization refers to the placement of one issue in the field of security by “presenting it as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures

and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure” (*Ibid.*, p. 24). Therefore, the securitization process consists of “an intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects”. In fact, it is precisely by placing a certain issue in the sphere of exception, that the author of the move claims specific rights over it. In Schmittian terms, it is only the realm of exception that allows for extraordinary measures, because “sovereign is he who decides on the exception” (Schmitt, 2005). Furthermore, it is important to clarify that firstly, securitization can be *ad hoc* or institutionalized and, secondly, that any kind of issue, pertaining to the most diverse field, can be removed from the “normal bargaining process of the public sphere”, and shifted in an emergency mode.

By way of illustration, to showcase the application of the securitization theory, one can consider the process of legitimization of the US pre-emptive war in Iraq of 2003. In fact, through a rhetoric based on arguments, the possession of weapons of mass destruction by the Saddam-Hussein regime and the Iraqi’s connection to “Islamist terrorism” *inter alia*, constitutive elements of the “Bush doctrine”<sup>4</sup>, the Bush administration legitimized its intervention in the Middle East. Iraq was indeed, in the aftermath of 9/11, presented as a threat of an exceptional character for America, the region and the international community. Subsequently, extraordinary actions, namely, the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq have been legitimized. This example is crucial for understanding the theory of securitization because the US justification of the war has been achieved precisely through the securitization of a political issue. For the Copenhagen School, “the process of securitization is what in language theory is called a speech act” (Buzan *et al.*, p. 26). Language is an *ius necessitatis* (Wæver, 1993) in the construction of the existential threat, which is based on the rhetoric of the survival. Accordingly, through the advocacy, through official and informal statements – the speech acts – of the American élite, the Iraqi’s regime has been portrayed as a threat to humankind, being thus securitized. However, an issue is successfully securitized not only through a speech act and thus through a securitizing move. The acceptance by the audience is also a constituent element of the process of securitization, following the CS. In fact, by assuming that this process

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<sup>4</sup> Look, *inter alia*: President Bush, G.W., (2002). *National Security Strategy of the United State of America*, Washington D.C. [<https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>. Accessed on the 04 January 2024].

has an intersubjective nature, the acceptance of the audience is a prerequisite for the success of the securitizing move. With reference to the abovementioned example of the Iraq War, initially, the division of the American public opinion's support for the military intervention in Iraq posed a challenge to the US administration. This led therefore to an increase of the persuasiveness of the American political elite's advocacy and thus to the use of an even more sophisticated terminology, *i.e.*: "the global war on terror", to spread insecurity (Doherty & Kiley 2008). The audience was persuaded, it accepted the American intervention. The required support for the intervention was achieved.

Moreover, focusing now on how to analyse securitization, specific units need to be distinguished. In fact, according to Buzan *et al.* (1998) three units of security analysis exists: the referent object, the securitizing actors, and the functional actors. The unit of the referent object refers to "things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival". Securitizing actors are "actors who securitize issues by declaring something – a referent object – existentially threatened" and functional actors are "actors who affect the dynamics of a sector" (Buzan *et al.*, p.36). More precisely, the referent object was traditionally identified either with the state, whose sovereignty, whose monopoly on the legitimate use of force in Weberian terms, was considered existentially threatened, or with the nation, whose national identity was threatened. However, beyond states, "limited collectivities" in CS terms, also private actors as firms, or non-governmental ones as NGOs, or the humankind as a whole, can perform the role of referent object (*Ibid.*, pp. 36-40). With reference to securitizing actors, they are instead the authors of the speech act, and to be considered as such, they must exert a certain authority (*Ibid.*, pp. 40-42). Therefore, they can be identified *in primis* with governments, but also with, among others, lobbyists, or economic leaders, as multinational corporations. Concerning functional actors, instead, little attention is given to them in the works of Buzan *et al.* However, their strong influence on the dynamics of the securitization process is ascertained. For instance, agencies of force, mercenaries, as the "Wagner Group" in the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine started in February 2022, can fall within the unit of functional actors.

Overall, it appears that referent objects, securitizing actors, and functional actors, but also the audience and the types of emergency measures adopted depend on the sector

of securitization. Securitization is situational and, according to the different security agendas – the Military, the Environmental, the Economic, the Societal and the Political one – as pointed out by the CS, actors, objects, and the audience differ.

### 1.1.3 – The securitization of migration in the European context

The Copenhagen School proposes the existence of different security agendas, each of them corresponding to a specific sector of analysis. These agendas are defined as analytical tools used to elucidate the different practices and dynamics of securitization (Albert & Buzan, 2011, pp. 413-425). A question therefore arises: what motivates the existence of these separate sectors? According to Buzan *et al.* the sectoral differences between securitization dynamics exist “to reduce complexity to facilitate analysis” (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, p. 8). Regarding each security agenda, the Military, the Environmental, the Economical, the Societal and the Political, the practice of securitization, as mentioned above, differs. Regarding the different agendas, the military sector is mostly concerned with relationships of forceful coercion, the political one is about the stability of the social order(s), the economic one deals with trade, finance and production, the social sector encompasses identity and the environmental one focuses on the relationship between the human and the planet (*Ibid.*, pp. 7,8). Interconnections between all these sectors exists. Therefore, a cross-sectoral analysis appears mandatory.

Turning now to migration, and adopting, so far, a broad understanding of it, that is the movement of a person or people from one place to another, and more precisely, the displacement involving the crossing of a state border – international migration –, it appears that migration is nowadays one of the main sources of anxiety. In fact, it is perceived as an “issue”, not only because it generates widespread insecurity on a global scale but also because it destabilizes long-standing norms of cultural identity, belonging, and security, leading to a state of uncertainty (Bourbeau, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, migration is increasingly identified, in the West especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as an existential threat. Following the migration-security nexus, the introduction of migration in the security studies stems back to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the rise of globalization, period in which, Traditional Security Studies reached their deepest crisis (Huysmans & Squire, 2010, p. 1). For what concerns the security agendas in which the

“issue migration” fits, migration, – in its broadest meaning, including also forced migration –, as previously mentioned, suits all sectors studied by Buzan *et al.* In fact, it can be a societal threat to identity, a political one to the state or to other juridical persons as international organisations, the EU, *inter alia*, and more in general to the internal legitimacy of the political unit (Buzan & al., 1998, pp. 21-163). Migration can also be an environmental threat, due to, *e.g.*, the negative environmental impact of refugees’ camps, and an economic one, given its relative burden on the welcoming country’s welfare system. However, the social and the political agenda are the most pertinent to address the securitization of migration. Precisely, the social agenda – more precisely the societal one – requires further clarification, given its importance in addressing the migration-security nexus. In fact, societal security refers to “collectivities and their identity [...] and to actions taken to defend such ‘we identities’” (*Ibid.*, p. 120). Most commonly, the “we identity” identifies with the state population or with a nation, but not only”. Moreover, “survival is a matter of identity” (Wæver *et al.* 1993, pp. 3-31), as it can be deduced, among others, from the role that national identity played in the Balkan Wars of 1990s. When it comes to examine the existential threat that migration poses to the societal agenda, the following paradigm is the starting point.

Migration—X people are being overrun or diluted by influxes of Y people; the X community will not be what it used to be, because others will make up the population; X identity is being changed by a shift in the composition of the population (Buzan *et al.*, p. 121).

Analysing, for instance, the first National Security Strategy (NSS) of the Trump administration, threats to the X community – the Americans – include Y people – African American or Hispanics. The X population composition is subject to a process of transformation. In fact, 2023 population estimates of the U.S. Census Bureau reveal that Black or African American alone and Hispanic or Latino constitute respectively 13,6% and 19,1% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). The goal of the present NSS is “to protect the American people, the American way of life, and American interests [...] and to strengthen American sovereignty (President Trump, 2017, 7)”. The securitization of U.S. borders and territory through, *inter alia*, the strengthen of borders controls and the restructuration of the immigration policy is therefore necessary and it corresponds in fact to pillar one of the NSS. Consequently, immigrants, threat to the “We identity”,



become a threat to the “us”, national identity. Thus, the basic postulate of the conservative political theorist Carl Schmitt, expressed in his theory of the Political<sup>5</sup> becomes relevant, although reductive and partially outdated because it neglects the complex interdependencies of the contemporary international society and the existence of multinational states, of nations without states and of states without nations. According to Schmitt, the political act establishes order in chaos and the order is precisely a clear separation between friend and enemy, between friend and *hostis*, absolute enemy (Schmitt, 2005). This separation, when transposed to migration, can be interpreted as follows: the friends are the citizens of one state and the *hostis* are the immigrants.

Moreover, in order to identify the referent object, and the different actors, involved in the securitization of migration, it is essential to define a specific level of the analysis and a geographical region. The levels of analysis, in the securitization theory, are identified as the “micro-” – *e.g.*: individuals –, the “medium-” – *e.g.*: states, nations and the “system-level” – *e.g.*: humankind, human rights. Migration appears to best fit the medium level, the one of state units. According to the CS, this level is also the one where securitization proves most successful, since “it engages in self-reinforcing rivalries with other limited collectivities. Such interaction strengthens in fact the We-feeling (Buzan & Wæver, 2009, p. 255)”. From a geographical point of view, the European region will be the focus of the analysis. In fact, if initially threats to the security of the European Community were the nations and the nation-like ethnics’ groups (Buzan & al., 1998), today immigrants, mostly from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, have also entered the list of existential threats to the European identity. Therefore, the referent object can be identified with the identity of the European Union. A *sui generis* organization that has a shared competence to develop a Common Migration and Asylum Policy. EU member states (MS) remain important actors and no homogeneity in the securitization process can be ascertained. In fact, the existence within the EU, of Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ), legally based on Article 3(2) of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and on Title V of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), is bound to the border-free Schengen Area established already in 1985,

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<sup>5</sup> Look, *inter alia*: Schmitt, C. (2008). *The concept of the political: Expanded edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Why not including this reference in the text? It is not less valuable than Trump’s

which abolished internal border controls, while providing for controls at its external ones (European Parliament, 2023a). Therefore, as might be expected, MS located at its external borders pursue a more intense securitization process, because of their wider exposure to migratory flows.

In this level of analysis, corresponding to the EU regional organization, in relation to the existential “immigration threat”, according to the principle of the shared competence both levels – the European and the national – are involved in policy making, thus performing the role of securitizing actors.

## *Section 1.2 – From the security speech act to the militarization of borders*

### 1.2.1 – Shifting the “migration issue from the political to the security agenda”. The limits of the Copenhagen School

The modern Leviathan is born two-faced. It appears closed and monolithic on the inside, precisely because of the existence of an inevitably threatening exterior. The gain of internal peace [...] is based on the exchange of protection for obedience. Through this, the modern state exorcises the conflict that necessitates its birth by expelling it to its exterior, into the anarchic realm of international relations (Costantini, 2003, p. 151).<sup>6</sup>

Following this paradigm, the “outside”, associated with migrants, constitutes an external threat, and must be securitized. Peace is in fact possible through an exchange of protection with obedience. The first stage of the process is, as previously outlined, the speech act. The speech act theory is founded on the fact that “stating is a performing act” and every utterance has a specific intention, purpose, or effect (Austin, 1959). Therefore, with reference to migration, the enemy – the immigrant – is created by politicians and legislators, through an ensemble of utterances, part of a specific “survival” rhetoric. Moreover, the speech act is bolstered by the role of mass-media, of the repressive action of law enforcement agencies, and of the lobby of private actors as, for instance, political parties. Insecurity is produced through the speech act and the public consensus is achieved, thus legitimatizing the securitizing move. By way of illustration, referring to the period of the 2015 “refugee crisis”, these are some excerpts from different speeches performed by different leader political figures – presidents or prime ministers of the time, from various European countries, mainly EU borders one, reported respectively by the newspapers: *Politico.eu*, *IlSole24ore*, *The Guardian*.

Czech President Miloš Zeman, 2015: “We’ll be deprived of women’s beauty, because they’ll be covered from head to toe [...] unfaithful women will be stoned and thieves will have their hands cut off (Politico, 2015)”.

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<sup>6</sup> “Il moderno Leviatano nasce *bifronte*. Esso appare chiuso e monolitico al proprio interno *proprio in virtù* della presenza di un esterno sul quale si affaccia con sguardo inevitabilmente minaccioso. Il guadagno della pace interna [...] si basa sullo scambio di protezione con ubbidienza. Con esso lo stato moderno esorcizza il confine che ne richiede la nascita espellendolo al proprio esterno nel regno anarchico delle relazioni internazionali (Costantini, 2003)”

Secretary of Lega Nord Matteo Salvini, 2014: “Tb and scabies do not come from Finland. Unfortunately, with a backward health system in North Africa these people reported illnesses that we had defeated for years (IlSole24Ore, 2019)”.

Hungary Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, 2015: “Those arriving have been raised in another religion, and represent a radically different culture. Most of them are not Christians, but Muslims [...] There is no alternative, and we have no option but to defend our borders (The Guardian, 2015)”.

It is therefore clear, that the “issue” of migration is firstly transformed in a political topic, thus becoming susceptible to instrumentalization. Secondly, it is manipulated by power holders, mostly by the head of state or of government, in their discourses to generate insecurity. In this second phase, securitizing actors create associations between migration and everything arising from the sphere of security to create what can be described as a “moral drama”. In addition to the adoption of the “survival rhetoric”, in order to amplify the perception of the threat and to gain the required audience support, powerholders exert influence on the information sector. In fact, by increasingly monopolising information and exploiting technologies such as social media, their influence on the audience increases. Moreover, the securitizing move occurs. Migration is shifted to the realm of security, above the “normal political realm” and, since the threatened referent object, convinced of its dangerous situation, has the right to survival, the securitizing actor is allowed to claim the right to adopt extraordinary measures. (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

However, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the securitization process initiated and pursued by the EU concerning the migration “issue”, developments in the field of Critical Security Studies should be considered, since alternatives to the Copenhagen School approach have emerged. Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu and Michael Foucault, the Paris School (PS) focuses on the “discourse” and the “emergency realm”. Accordingly, it is not the speech act that drives the process of securitization, but the security practice itself. In fact, “the practical work, discipline and expertise are as important as all forms of discourse (Bigo, 2000, p. 19)”. A “tool of securitization” is “an identifiable social and technical “dispositive” or device embodying a specific threat

image through which public action is configured to address a security issue” (Balzacq 2008, p. 79). Moreover, the PS argues that securitization occurs through routine and over time. In fact, it “works through everyday technologies, through the effects of powers that are continuous rather than exceptional [...] and especially through the institutional competition within the professional security field” (Bigo, 2002, p. 75). Therefore, securitizing actors can be identified not only in powerful subjects, but also, for instance, in the police, the military. Securitization occurs on a daily basis; technology is a constituent element of the securitization process and internal and external security are interconnected. Consequently, one can argue that securitization of migration at the EU level is the outcome of both the speech act of powerholders and practices in PS terms, as “the advancements in control and surveillance technologies” (*Ibid.*, p. 76).

### 1.2.2 – The European migration and asylum policy

In order to proceed with the analysis of the securitization of migration pursued by the European Union through discourse and practice, a brief overview of the birth and evolution of the European asylum system appears essential.

#### *Historical overview of the European migration and asylum policy*

The adoption of the Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997, entered into force in 1999, and the relative expansion of the EU competences, is conventionally identified as the origin of the EU migration and asylum policy. Already in the 1990s, more precisely during the 1999 Tampere European Council, a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) has been established. The objective pursued was the management of migration and asylum through the development of common standards and co-operation and the compliance with the existing refugee’s international law: the 1951 Geneva Convention and related 1967 New York Protocol. Conventionally, the evolution of the CEAS is divided into 4 phases (EUAA, 2021).

The first phase, 1999-2000, corresponds to the adoption of a first package of legislative instruments to develop an EU asylum policy: the Asylum Procedures Directive (85/2005/CE), the Reception Condition Directive (2003/9/CE), the Qualification Directive (2004/83/CE) the Dublin Regulation (343/2003), and the EURODAC

Regulation (2725/2000). One agency has also been established in this first phase: the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). Moreover, in 2004, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) has been established to “support EU Member States (MS) and Schengen associated countries, in their management of the EU’s external borders and the fight against cross-border crimes” (Regulation 2007/2004). The period 2006-2013 corresponds to the second generation of the CEAS. A legislative development occurred and, in fact, the previously adopted directives and regulations have been recast, mainly to uniform the protection level and to improve practical cooperation (European Commission, n.d.,a). The Qualification Directive (95/2011), setting standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection (BIP), the Asylum Procedure directive (32/2013), harmonizing the procedures for the granting and withdrawal of international protection, and the Reception Condition Directive (33/2013), establishing standards for the reception of asylum seekers, are the of major importance. However, 2015 corresponds to a turning point in the European migration governance, to what is commonly referred to as the “refugee crisis”. This third phase of the CAES is therefore characterized by an unprecedented number of arrivals of refugees and migrants to Europe, more than 1.2 million, according to 2016 Eurostat Statistics (Eurostat, 2016). Deficiencies and gaps in the CEAS emerged, mostly due to the disproportionate responsibility shouldered by external frontier MS, on the grounds of the Dublin System: the system prescribing that the MS responsible for the examination of the asylum application is the one coinciding with the first point of irregular entry of a third-country national (European Commission, n.d.,b). Therefore, in May 2015 the European Commission presented a new European Agenda on Migration (COM (2015) 240 final) to address the existing challenges, by proposing short- and long-term priorities, as, *inter-alia*, the improvement of Search and Rescue, through the increase of FRONTEX budget for its joint-operations (Frontex, (n.d.), the establishment of EU-sponsored resettlement schemes (European Commission, (n.d.,c), and the implementation of the “hotspot” approach (European Commission, n.d.,d). Between 2015 and 2020, two packages of reforms have been adopted, and the EU-partnership with third countries for a better management of migration flows, as, among

others, the 2016 EU- Türkiye MoU<sup>7</sup> has strengthened (EUAA, 2021; European Commission, n.d.). However, despite the improvements of the CEAS undertaken so far, the need of further reforms emerged, given, for instance, disparities in the distribution of the migration burden between frontline countries and other MS not located at the periphery of the Union. In 2020, a new set of regulations and policies, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (COM (2020)609 final) was proposed, by the European Commission, thus opening the fourth phase of the CEAS. The Pact, agreed in 2023, composed of a set of regulations and policies, aims “to create a fairer, efficient, and more sustainable migration and asylum process for the European Union (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2023)”. In fact, it is designed to “manage and normalize migration in the long-term” through, *inter alia*, the improvement of procedures, the establishment of a new solidarity mechanism and the enhancement of resilience and flexibility in case of crisis (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2023). Moreover, this last and current phase of the CEAS is also marked by the activation of the 2001 Temporary Protection Directive 2001/55/CE, by the Council of the European Union, “in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on 24 February 2022, to offer quick and effective assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine” (European Commission, n.d.,e). However, although certainly many steps forward have been accomplished for a better management of migration and asylum in response to the various challenges confronting the EU, the CEAS, and relative asylum policy, is not exempt from criticism. In fact, throughout the various phases, condemnations from civil society organizations, such as Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2016) or Amnesty International (AI, 2023), have been a constant. The EU migration and asylum policy’s compliance with human rights, international law, and international law principles, *e.g.*: non-discrimination – Article 2 GC –, non-refoulement – Article 33 GC – and non-penalization – Article 31 GC – is questioned and its securitizing character is frequently underlined.

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<sup>7</sup>For further information look, *inter alia*: European Commission, (2015). “Memo: EU-Turkey joint action”. [[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO\\_15\\_5860](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_15_5860). Visited on the 04 February 2024].

### *The CEAS and the security theory: a new migration-security nexus?*

In order to answer this question, speech acts and securitizing practices will serve as the pivot of the analysis. Firstly, considering developments of the CEAS, it is clear that there is an interdependence between the volume of migration flows and the European migration policy. Secondly, the previous historical reconstruction reveals that 2015 constitutes a rupture in the migration scenario, given the unprecedented number of arrivals. Consequently, this leads to the assumption that precisely 2015, the year of the so-called “refugee crisis” and of the Paris terrorist attacks, marks the beginning of the European securitization process. An increase in securitizing discourses, moves and technology is in fact remarkable. Statements of the EU political élite, the language adopted in European policy documents, *e.g.*: communications of the European Commission, or reports from agencies as FRONTEX show a securitizing rhetoric. At the same time, securitizing practices, as the development of surveillance technology, *e.g.*: the Schengen Information System (SIS) or the EURODAC system, have proliferated since 2015. However, many academic studies point out the existence of a migration-security continuum even before the 2015 “refugee crisis” (Baele & Sterck, 2015; Bigo, 2002; Karamanidou, 2015; Leonard, 2010; Van Munster, 2009). M. Stępką suggests three dimensions of securitization frames and narratives: (1) “constitutional securitizing moves”, embedded mostly within the EU Treaties framing the EU internal security dimension, (2) the “Fortress Europe” rhetoric, focused on border controls and the management of migratory flows and (3) the “EU security, migration and asylum policies”, often “linking immigration with clandestine, illicit, and even terrorism-related activities” (Stępką, 2022, p. 63).

Even if the migration-security nexus pre-exists 2015, this year marks an escalation in the securitization of migration. Two logics, which primary contribute to frame migration as a security issue, emerge: the “human-centred” one, and the “risk management one” (*Ibid.*, p. 93). Accordingly, in a first moment, the “human security logic” is adopted to frame the “migration crisis”. Countries of origin are depicted by the EU discourse as sources of “radicalization, violence and terrorism” (COM, 2015, 185), hence placing the threat far away from the EU. The Union is also defined as the “safe haven for those fleeing persecution” (COM, 2015, 240). In fact, statements of the former



President of the European Commission, J. C. Juncker, identifying the crisis as a “matter of humanity and of human dignity” (Juncker, 2015, p. n.d.). provide, an example of this. Migrants are depicted as subjects under threat, primary because of the socio-political instability that characterizes their countries of origin – “the war in Syria, the terror of the Islamic State in Libya, or dictatorship in Eritrea” (*Ibid.*). The humanitarian features of the “migration crisis” are clear. As for the “risk-management approach”, “migrants at risk” become “risky migrants”, undermining the internal security of the EU, by reasons of “trans-border organized crime or terrorism”, among others (Stępką, 2022, p. 107). Statements, as “growing flows of illegal migration”, characterize indeed, the EU normative framework adopted after 2015 (EUCO 22/15). Migratory flows are framed as:

Having a significant potential for decreasing the structural efficiency of the EU internal security system, consequently jeopardizing the stability and controllability of the Schengen zone, freedom of movement and external borders of the EU (Stępką, 2022, p. 117).

As a result, both logics place migration on the internal-external security axis and human mobility in the realm of exception (*Ibid.*, p. 120). However, it is the “risk-management” approach which identifies migrants as security nuisance, thus diverging from the “human-centred” approach. In fact, by placing the locus of the crisis in the EU internal security domain, the sustainability of control over the EU external borders and migration becomes the referent object, thus calling for security measures oriented to the control, management, and surveillance of human mobility, with the aim to regain control on the EU’s external borders and internal security realm (*Ibid.*, p. 176).

### *From “exceptionality” to institutional security practices*

Regardless the adopted framework and following the CS approach to security, it is clear that migration is framed as an exceptional threat and therefore it is shifted in the realm of “exceptionality”, thus requiring the adoption of exceptional measures to handle the “issue”. Among these extraordinary new measures to deal with the “migration issue”, for example, the strategic document adopted in May 2015: a European Agenda on Migration (COM (2015b) 240final) is a clear example. This Communication of the European Commission provides for the establishment of the “hotspot approach” an “operational solution for emergency situations”, which should be implemented at the

request of frontline member states in the event of a “disproportionate migratory pressure”. However, although this approach has been conceived as an exceptional measure, end 2023, eight years after the migration crisis, four hotspots are active in Italy and five in Greece (Radjenovic, 2023). The practice is normalized, it falls no longer in the realm of exceptionality. Accordingly, if on the one hand, precisely the emergency rhetoric enhanced the adoption of extraordinary measures, on the other hand, these measures, which have lost their emergency nature, are independent securitizing practices. They enjoy an autonomous existence, becoming themselves the authors of security. It is precisely at this point that the Copenhagen School assumptions enter into crisis. The logic of exceptionality does not seem to perfectly suit the EU migration management. Many practices are performed daily, they are institutionalized, and their actors are not only subjects in a position of power, as the European political élite. Therefore, the assumptions of the Paris School of security studies become essential for the analysis of the European securitization process. In fact, the securitizing discourse is complemented by securitizing practices, primary enacted by policy tools (Balzacq, 2010, pp. 1-30). These everyday practices, contribute to the creation of the “migration threat”, amplifying the perception of the “moral drama”. Moreover, they respond to the logics, – the “humanitarian” and the “risk-management” ones – mentioned above, because their focus is both on countries of origin/transit and on border management, thus contributing to internal and external security. For what concerns the first logic, one can consider, as an example, the expansion of the EU partnership with third countries, emerged mostly after 2015. In fact, such practice, which is known as “the externalization of migration” is institutionalized. Before understanding how this practice contributes to spread insecurity, it is necessary to understand what it is. The term "externalization", coined by certain NGOs in 2003, defines extraterritorial state actions undertaken by the EU and the Member States to keep certain asylum seekers at a distance. However, Europe is not the pioneer in this practice. Externalization was already widespread in other parts of the world. A clear example of it is the externalization of migration, promoted under the Clinton Administration, in the form of the interception of 'boat people' fleeing Haiti and their transfer to the US naval base at Guantanamo during the 1990s. Accordingly, the term “externalization” refers to:

Extraterritorial State actions to prevent migrants, including asylum-seekers, from entering the legal jurisdictions or territories of destination countries or regions or of making them

legally inadmissible without individually considering the merits of their protection claims (Frelick & Kysel & Podkul, 2016).

Therefore, the practice of bilateral-, multilateral-policy initiatives, as the 2016 EU-Türkiye MoU or the 2017 Italy-Libya one, has proliferated after 2015. For what concerns the reason why externalization is a securitization practice, agreements concluded to prevent migrants from reaching Europe contribute to construct the threat of migration to the referent object. More precisely, among the aims of the resulting agreements with third countries, there are: the “fight against illegal immigration, human trafficking, and fuel smuggling, and the reinforcement of the security of the border” (Odysseus Network, 2018). All these elements are clear factors to be fought against. Moreover, another example of securitizing practices is based on the fact that, as the Paris School argues, securitizing actors are not just powerholders, also other agencies can perform this role.

### *FRONTEX & Europol: the EU main securitizing actors*

Among the various EU agencies involved in the migration governance, FRONTEX, and the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), have contributed significantly to securitize migration through its practice (Lutterbeck, 2006; Léonard, 2010; Bello, 2017). FRONTEX has been established in 2004, by Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 and is responsible for six “main tasks”. Among them are: following up on developments in research relevant for the control and surveillance of external borders, assisting Member States when increased technical and operational assistance at external borders is required, and assisting Member States in organizing joint return operations (Regulation 2007/2004). Its contribution to the securitization process can be identified, for example, in its performance of joint operations, as the joint-operations Themis – 2018-ongoing, in the Central Mediterranean – and “Poseidon” – 2006-ongoing, in the Eastern Mediterranean – and “Indalo” – 2010-ongoing, in the Western Mediterranean. The fact that the objectives of these missions are, in addition to the contribution to Search and Rescue capacities of member states, the target of migrant smugglers and the securing of EU borders through border surveillance (European Council & Council of the EU, n.d.), strongly contributes to spread insecurity within the EU. The number of FRONTEX standing corps at EU borders strongly

increased since 2015 and, it is commonly argued that FRONTEX is a *de facto* supranational police force (Campesi, 2015). Consequently, the deployment of border police to maintain the internal security of the Union is a clear driver of fear because law enforcement agencies are commonly associated with an unstable situation of distress. In addition, the conclusion of agreements between FRONTEX and the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as the 2016 one concluded within the Poseidon Operation to “cut the lines of human trafficking and illegal migration” (Frontex, 2016), is another practice with a clear securitizing potential with respect to migration. In fact, it fosters insecurity because the involvement of an international organization with a military character rises awareness that migration is a threat to security, since the military sphere amplifies the perception of the threat.

Considering this, regardless of whether securitization is the result of a securitizing rhetoric, based on "Fortress Europe", or whether it is itself a securitizing practice aiming to institutionalize the "migration" threat, European borders emerge increasingly as the *locus* of a new phenomenon: the militarization of the border. Militarization refers to “the systematic intensification of the border’s security apparatus, transforming the area from a transnational frontier to a zone of permanent vigilance, enforcement, and violence” (NNIRR, n.d.). Different indicators show the ampler of the phenomenon. Among them are: the rhetoric, practice and increase in the standing corps of European agencies, as FRONTEX or Europol, the EU budget allocated to border security and the improvement in surveillance technology. Firstly, FRONTEX will comprise, by 2027, 10,000 standing corps officers (Frontex, n.d.). Secondly, for what concerns the EU budget 2021-27, 43.9 billion EUR are allocated to security and defence (Jones & Klipatrick & Maccanico, 2022). Only 19.7 billion EUR were allocated for the same sector in the previous seven-year budgetary cycle. In fact, the Internal Security Fund increased by 90%, the Internal Border Management Fund increased by 131%, and the funds to agencies as FRONTEX and Europol increased by 129% with respect to the 2014-2020 period (*Ibid.*). Moreover, Considering the surveillance technology, after the 2015 “refugee crisis”, COM (2016) 205 final already outlined the need for “stronger and smarter information systems for border security”. Legislative instruments have therefore been adopted to improve the existing information systems, as the Automated Fingerprint Identification System, the Visa Information System, *inter alia*, and to develop additional information ones, as the

Entry-Exit System. In addition, also research projects in this field are increasing. For instance, the Intelligent Portable Control System (iBorderCtrl) is funded by the EU for the development of emotion detection artificial intelligence (AI) at EU borders<sup>8</sup>, or rather, as suggested by the report *Europe's Techno Borders* by NGOs Statewatch and EuroMed Rights of July 2023, at EU “Techno-Borders” (Statewatch, 2023).

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<sup>8</sup>For further information look: Dumbarva, C. (2021). Artificial intelligence at EU borders. Overview of application and key issue. EPRS, European Parliamentary Research Service. [[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2021/690706/EPRS\\_IDA\(2021\)690706\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2021/690706/EPRS_IDA(2021)690706_EN.pdf). Visited on the 15 February 2024].

## *Section 1.3 – The need of a methodological change. Towards de-securitization*

### 1.3.1 – The drawbacks of the securitization of migration in the European Union

Having analysed the theoretical framework and the practical application – to European migration and asylum policy – of the theory of securitization, it is important to critically evaluate its process and outcome and to question its desirability. In fact, there is a large body of academic literature, in the field of security studies, which highlights the critical issues of securitization, its limitations, its related risks and which investigates alternatives to counter it, as, for instance, de-securitization. In addition, regarding the securitization of migration occurring at the European level, questions arise concerning, among others, its compliance with the international and European law of human rights.

From a theoretical point of view, Scholar Claudia Aradau, already in 2004 argues for a negative conception of securitization, in the wake of Wæver (1995), thus opening the academic debate. Drawing on the assumptions of the CS, Aradau criticizes both the “process” of securitization itself, and thus the recourse to the realm of exception, and the “outcome” of the process, that is the production of the enemy in Schmittian terms (Aradau, 2004). In fact, two categories of subjects are created: the “have” and the “have-nots” and the latter are those who are excluded from the political community (Dunne & Wheeler, 2004). Regarding the process, criticism focuses on the relationship between securitization and the “exception”. In fact, Aradau argues that through the adoption of extraordinary measures, securitization undermines liberal parliamentarism and democracy, since liberal democracies function through normal politics (Aradau, 2004). Moreover, government’s openness and accountability decrease when the process of securitization occurs. The main reason for this is the fact that securitization is, in the CS theory, characterized by silence and speed: deliberation, on the issue undergoing the securitizing process, is minimal, and the decision-making process is accelerated (Roe, 2012, pp. 254,255). Regarding, instead, the “outcome” of securitization and, in CS terms, the achievement of the friend-enemy, desirable/undesirable, or even civilization/anarchy distinction, ethical considerations should be addressed. Precisely, it should be

investigated the opposition between the consequentialist and the deontological approach to the subject. The former is grounded on the fact that “the moral rightness of an action is dependent on its consequences” (Anscombe, 1958). The latter focuses on duty and morality (Kant, 1953). By adopting a consequentialist approach, securitization can assume a positive connotation. In fact, even if it is a process that serves the interests of some (the referent object), at the expense of others (the threat), the practice is legitimized, when the referent object’s interest is higher than the “other’s one” (Floyd, 2007 p. 37-40). Accordingly, its outcome, that is security for the many, is preferable to security for the few and the maximization of genuine security is for Consequentialists an overarching value (*Ibid.*). However, no deontological approach would ever support a practice, which leads to such a result. No distinction between “good friends” and “bad enemies” would ever be compatible with Kant’s categorical imperative: “act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (Kant, 1953). Therefore, the securitizing move, achieved through the instrumentalization of the language and through the adoption of the “security” rhetoric, is to consider an immoral act.

From a more pragmatic point of view, taking up the analysis of the securitization of migration at the European level, exemplified in the previous section, some main critical issues can be identified, considering the consequences of this process. The militarization of the border and relative compliance with human rights, migrants’ torture, the rise of radicalization and political extremism, and the challenges posed to integration, question indeed the desirability of securitization. Firstly, the border management established by the European migration and asylum policy raises concerns about the respect of asylum seekers’ human rights. For instance, FRONTEX non-conformity with the principle of non-refoulement and, therefore the involvement of the agency in illegal pushbacks emerges from the jurisprudence of, *inter alia*, the ECtHR<sup>9</sup>, or from reports of NGOs, as the 2020-21 joint investigation by *Lighthouse Reports*, *Bellingcat*, *Der Spiegel ARS* and *Asahi TV* which led to a further investigation by the EU anti-fraud watchdog OLAF<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Look, *inter alia*: *Safi and others v. Greece* [First Section], no. 5418/2015, ECtHR; *N.D. and N.T. v. Spain [GC]*, no. 8675/15 and 8697/15, ECtHR.

<sup>10</sup> For further information look: Bellincat, (2020). “Frontex at Fault: European Border Force Complicit in ‘Illegal’ Pushbacks”, *Bellingcat*. [<https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/10/23/frontex-at-fault-european-border-force-implicit-in-illegal-pushbacks/>]. Visited on the 15 February 2024]; OLAF (2021).

Moreover, between 2014 and 2022, the aggregate length of border fences at the EU's external borders and within the EU/Schengen area grew from 315 km to 2 048 km (Dumbrava, 2022). Militarization is pushed to the max and in this military regime, the respect for human rights, including the right to asylum, and the respect for the rule of law in the asylum-system itself are not consistently guaranteed. A further critical aspect coincides with the fact that militarization is often compounded by the 'emergency' regime under which borders are often managed. Many frontline member states have, in fact, decreed the “state of emergency”, in conjunction with the exceeding of their reception capacities, thus enabling themselves to derogate from several guarantees provided for, *inter alia*, in the 2013 Reception Condition Directive and the Asylum Procedure Directive of 2013. For instance, Poland, responded to the 2021 mass influx of migrants at its border with Belarus, with an even harder militarization of the border, also considering triggering Article 4 of the NATO founding treaty, thus turning the situation into a real humanitarian catastrophe. Migrants have been “weaponized” by Lukashenko’s regime, instrumentalizing them, to attack the EU, “to flood it with migrants” for the European sanctions that followed the Belarussian elections of 2020 (Kuznetsov, 2021). Polish answer, to this “hybrid attack”<sup>11</sup>, clearly showed the failure of the European migration policy from two points of view. On the one hand, the decision, by a third country, to weaponize migrants to conduct its foreign policy against the Union, condemnable as it is, demonstrates *per se* that migration management is a weakness of the EU. On the other hand, the resulting European management of human mobility, which derogates to the asylum *acquis*, in case of “emergency”, though, for instance, the extension of the border procedure, the neglect of vulnerability, the delay in asylum applications ‘registration, and, more concretely, abuses of the police forces and executions of refoulements, have massive human rights costs. Numerous are the alleged violations of human rights protected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union – EU original law

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Case No. OC/2021/0451/A1. “Olaf final report on FRONTEX”, *FragDenStaat.de*. [<https://fragdenstaat.de/dokumente/233972-olaf-final-report-on-frontex/>. Visited on the 20 February 2024].

<sup>11</sup> European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen defined the instrumentalization of migrants for political purposes by Belarus unacceptable, as an “hybrid attack” which legitimized illegal pushbacks and inhumane conditions in the so-called “restricted zone”. For further information look, *inter alia*: von der Leyen, U., (2021). “The situation at the border between Poland and Belarus”, *ec.europa.eu*. [[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT\\_21\\_5867](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_21_5867). Visited on the 10 April 2024].



– and by the European Convention of Human Rights, to which all the EU member states are party. Secondly, the securitization of migration is also often considered a driver of radicalization and polarisation (Bartoszewicz, 2016; Carlà, 2022; Gattinara & Morales, 2017; Özgür & Selcen, 2021). In fact, the association of migration to criminality, to cultural alienation anxiety, to major changes in the socio-demographic equilibrium and to welfare chauvinism, is a boost to further xenophobic and racist rhetoric, as islamophobia and practices as social exclusion. Systemic racism, racist hate crime and speech incidents, discriminatory profiling practices by police, are in fact, constant in EU member states, as outlined by the 2023 Fundamental Rights Report (FRA, 2023). Recent research of the Pew Research Centre, based on different surveys, shows an increase of right-wing populist parties across Europe<sup>12</sup>. Numerous among these parties, the French *Rassemblement National*, the Italian *Lega Nord* or the German *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) find public support for their anti-immigration stance, since, people, now, aware of the "immigration" threat seek security. For instance, AfD, since its establishment in 2013, transformed from an anti-eurozone party to an anti-immigrant one. Echoing Huysmans' framing of migration as a security issue within the EU (Huysmans, 2006, p. 52), the AfD exploits the fear of outsiders as a "political currency" spent to gain popular support. For instance, the party's recent activity, as the discussion of the so-called "Remigration Masterplan"<sup>13</sup>, in late 2023, can be designed as a driver of radicalization. The plan, rooted in white supremacy and conspiracy theories as the "Great Replacement" one, provides, in fact, for the deportation in countries of origin of migrants and non-assimilated. Its rhetoric and choices of word constitute a vehicle of xenophobia. However, despite protests, and a public, even institutional condemnation of "Remigration", and more generally of the AfD, the party is gaining momentum in Germany. Its support rose, indeed, from 5% in 2014 to 19% in February 2024 (Politico, 2024). The audience, feeling under threat, is therefore accepting the speech. In addition, radicalization, together with the increase of right-wing anti-elitists sentiments and extremism, deeply affects migrants'

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<sup>12</sup> For further information, look, *inter alia*: Winke *et al.* (2019). European Public Opinion Three Decades After the Fall of Communism", *PewResearchCenter*.

<sup>13</sup> For further information, look, *inter alia*: The ECRE, (2024). Germany: Far-Right 'Remigration' Meeting Provokes Anger in the Streets, Interior Minister Attributes Decrease in Irregular Border Crossings to Stronger Controls Despite Concerns over Schengen Rules, Adoption of the "Repatriation Improvement Act" Raises Fears and Concerns among NGOs, Ecre.org. [<https://ecre.org/germany-far-right-remigration-meeting-provokes-anger-in-the-streets-chancellor-attributes-decrease-in-irregular-border-crossings-to-stronger-controls-despite-concerns-over-schengen/>]. Visited on the 20 February 2024].

integration, thus constituting a hindering factor. Article 34 of the Geneva Convention providing for the duty, of states parties to “facilitate assimilation and naturalisation of refugees”, today, integration, is therefore constantly breached. In addition, the international community has often emphasised the importance of integration and naturalisation in various non-binding international documents, as the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the 2016 Global Compact for Migration, an inter-governmentally negotiated agreement under the auspice of the UN, but which remains a political commitment. However, despite the cultural pluralism of modern democracies, assimilationism is therefore gaining again momentum in the EU, thus prevailing over multiculturalism, and social exclusion is produced, due to the exacerbation of anti-immigrant racism and the related opposition to pluralism and minority rights. Consequently, given the contested effectivity and legitimization of a human mobility containment, governed by control and deterrence, the desirability of the securitization of migration seems challenged.

### 1.3.2 – The debated concept of de-securitization

In the late 1990s, the CS suggested the concept of de-securitization: the returning of issues from “emergency politics” to “normal politics”, the reverse of the securitization process. Accordingly, to de-securitize means to “take security out of security, to move it back to normal politics” (Roe, 2004, p. 285), and, conversely to securitization, de-securitization consists of de-securitizing speech acts and practices. The potential of de-securitizing politics, that is the “normal bargaining process of the public sphere” helps to manage issues more effectively, thus reinforcing democracy (Wæver, 1995, p. 57). Other scholars argued the desirability of this process, in terms of its “potential efficiency”, greater “democratic-ness”, and of the “possibility it offers to re-order the domestic in a more just way” (Behnke, 2000; Grayson, 2003; Huysmans, 1998; Roe, 2004).

However, de-securitization did not receive the same attention, as securitization, from academia and it has long remained almost unexplored, particularly with respect to migration. Therefore, different interpretations of the concept exist. No universal and univocal ontological and epistemic understanding of de-securitization can be ascertained, and its practical declination – de-securitizing strategies – varies. Commonly, this process

has been understood as a supplement of securitization, even semantically originating from it, bearer of a subordinated status. An analytical conception of it prevailed to a political one, and the assumption that it enjoys a political status raised, indeed, scepticism. Originally, it was, in fact, conceptualized in “relatively a-theoretical terms, as a preference, *ceteris paribus*, deprived of any political sting” (Aradau, 2004, p. 406). However de-securitization does not directly imply the downgrading of the issue to a non-political arena and the adoption of technical solutions. It has, in fact, a political status precisely because it re-establishes the public sphere where the previously securitized issue will be debated (Hansen, 2012, p. 531). De-securitization strategies vary in terms of process and agencies, and they are therefore context dependent. Huysmans (1995), proposed three strategies to de-securitize the migration-security nexus, based on the disarticulation of the friend/enemy distinction and on the opposition to the invocation of exceptionality through security.

The objectivist approach aims to convince the securitization’s referent object that the migrant is not a security issue; the constructivist one is focused on the comprehension of the securitizing process, thus enabling to handle it; and the de-constructivist one consists in the recount of the migrant’s story, depicting the migrant as someone who is like *us* – woman, father, workers, student – (Huysmans, 1995, pp. 66,67). Conceiving de-construction as the pathway to de-securitize, to unmake security, attention should be paid to the agency that will initiate and drive de-securitization. In fact, in order to avoid the reproduction of “hegemonic structures”, the agents of de-securitization should be the securitized subjects themselves, they should stem from the “silenced others” (Aradau, 2003, p. 20). The political élite cannot perform the role of the de-securitizing actor, because no equal political engage on the part of the “other” would be possible (Roe, 2004, p. 264). In fact, while securitization is usually analysed from the perspective of the referent object – *e.g.*: the hosting nation-state/the EU –, the study of de-securitization requires an opposite perspective. Instead of methodological nationalism, other approaches, as the Autonomy of Migration appear more consistent to de-securitize. This approach draws on the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 1977). Accordingly, “subjugated knowledge” can take the form of “disqualified knowledge”, *e.g.*, the “*savoir des gens*”, and, if reactivated, it can “de-subjugate historical knowledges [...] to enable them to oppose and struggle against the [...] scientific hierarchicalization

of knowledge and its intrinsic power-effect” (*Ibid.*, p. 170). In other terms, scientific knowledge, that is constructed and organized according to certain rigorous criteria of science, is not inherently superior to other forms of knowledge, as narratives of powerless. In fact, “what people know at a local level” can disqualify the “unitary, formal and scientific theoretical discourse”, which is the product of the control of knowledge production. This will also lead to transformations in power-relations, because the control of knowledge production also implies the control of power relations between social groups. The process of selecting, hierarchizing and marginalizing knowledges has, as a result, the maintenance of certain subjectivities in a position of subordination (*Ibid.*, p. 169). Translated to the realm of migration, migrants’ knowledge – “minor” form of knowledge made up of the subjectivity of migrants’ mobility, –, if requalified, has the potential to destabilize and to weaken the “security truth”, established by securitizing actors. The Autonomy of Migration conceives therefore the management of human mobility from the migrants’ point of view, knowledge, practices (Mezzadra, 2011). As a result, migrants should be considered as agents of political transformation with the potential to unmake the established understanding of the public sphere and of the friend-enemy binomial through their counter-narratives and counter-practices. Therefore, migrants themselves and other securitized subjects, as actors of the solidarity sector like NGOs operating in Search and Rescue activities, have the potential to influence the conceptions of “belonging” – the self –, mostly based on citizenship, thus including other forms of belonging: not based on national citizenship, but, for instance, on free movement of people (van Munster, 2004). After the recognition of migrants as belonging, the successive step to achieve de-securitization should be their integration in the political community, re-identifying migrants with a universal right-entitled category (Aradau, 2004). This will enable migrants to engage with securitizing actors, through negotiations, moving the securitized actors to a realm of inclusion, normal politics, and deliberation (Roe, 2004). This process of re-identification of migrants, providing them with a political status, together with the participation of political actors, performing the role of additional actors in the de-securitization process, is a condition *sine qua non* for its success. In fact, de-securitization cannot be successful as long as policies and structures upholding securitization dynamics are changed. “The rearticulation of the issue, migration, from the securitized by actively offering a political solution to the threats, dangers and grievances

in question” (Hansen, 2012, p. 542) is needed. Migrants’ counteractions should be coupled by rhetorical and policy-oriented initiatives by political élites. Moreover, considering where de-securitization should take place, the local level seems the most appropriate to pursue this agency-oriented approach, since the “‘local’ is where relations between communities are (re)negotiated ‘reciprocally’” (Aradau, 2003, p.20).

## Chapter 2 – The case study of Italy

### *Section 2.1 – Historical and political framing of Italy’s migration legislation<sup>14</sup>*

#### 2.1.1 – 1973: From a country of emigration to a country of immigration

Since the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, Italy has long been a country of emigration. Until 1973 four waves of emigration occurred: (1) 1861-1899 the “great emigration”, (2) 1900-1920 the “mass exodus”, (3) 1921-1945 emigration during fascism and (4) 1946-1973 emigration after World War II, each of them presenting different features. The first two periods recorded a steady growth in the number of Italians emigrants, respectively about 6 and 10 million. Regarding countries of emigration, about half of Italians settled in Europe and the other half chose the American continent, especially the industrial city of New York in the USA, and Brazil and Argentina for Latin America (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, 2020). During the 20-years fascist period, from 1922 to 1943, the share of Italian emigrants undergone a decline, due to restrictions on emigration flows imposed by the Fascist Government and the 1929 Wall Street crisis. However, the emigration towards the Italian colonies of the time – Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, and Ethiopia – was strongly emphasized and the emigration of anti-fascist political exiles also increased. It is precisely during the Fascist regime that the first measures regarding immigration were endorsed. The Royal Decree 1848/1926 *Testo Unico delle Leggi di Pubblica Sicurezza* [Consolidated Text of Laws on Public Security] was adopted in 1926, together with the establishment of an official bureau for the registration of foreigners, thus becoming the reference text for the Italian immigration management until the adoption of the first migration law in 1986.

#### *Towards the first immigration legislation.*

In the aftermath of World War II, Italian emigration sharply rose, amounting to almost 7.5 million emigrants in the period 1946-1975, mostly directed to Europe – Switzerland and the Federal Republic of Germany ahead (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS,

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<sup>14</sup> See Annex I for a timeline graph comparing Italian legislative acts/provisions and CEAS developments.

2020). Internal migration grew significantly, from the south to the north, and an early immigration, mostly composed of refugees from Istria and Dalmatia and from colonial territories, and of Jews transiting from Italy to Israel or to the United States was also registered (Colucci, 2018). The right to asylum was enshrined in the 1946 Constitution in article 10 as follows:

(2) The legal status of foreigners shall be regulated by law in conformity with international rules and treaties; (3) Foreigners to whom the actual exercise of the democratic freedoms guaranteed by the Italian Constitution is denied in their own country, shall be entitled to the right of asylum within the territory of the Republic, under conditions laid down by law; (4) The extradition of a foreigner for political offences shall not be permitted.

In 1954 Italy ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, but the recognition of refugee status was limited to asylum applicants coming from Europe. However, it is 1973 the year that constitutes a real divide in the Italian and international migration panorama. In fact, the 1973 Oil Crisis, together with the Yom Kippur War, changed the balance and the composition of international mobility (Colucci, 2018). In conjunction with the growth of the public debt and unemployment and the subsequent adoption of neo-liberal measures, such as the dismantling of public welfare systems and economic deregulation, European countries with a long immigration history, Germany, France, and the UK *inter alia*, began to adopt measures to close their borders. For what concerns Italy, precisely 1975 corresponded to a total reversal of migratory flows, thus turning Italy into a receiving country (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, 2020).

Italian immigration began to develop in the late 1970s with the inclusion of immigrants occurring solely and exclusively through the labour market and not through the social system. The existence and exercise of migrants' rights was guaranteed neither by their belonging to humankind (*ius naturale*) nor by territorial belonging (*ius loci*), nor even by belonging to the nation by blood descent (*ius sanguinis*). They were subordinated to being an active and productive labour force (*ius laboris*) (Perocco, 2003, pp. 218-219). No regular pathways to enter Italy were present. Immigration was governed by periodic *ad-hoc* interventions, by the so-called *Sanatorie* [amnesties]: a special governmental measure, not constituting a source of law, through which irregular foreign nationals are granted the opportunity to obtain a residence permit and that regularizes irregular labour

relations. Since its very beginning certain issues, that will repeatedly arise over time, were brought to light: “imbalances in the labour market, problems of intervention and understanding of the phenomenon by the institutions, prominence of civil society, alarmism about security [...] and exploitation of irregular labour” (Colucci, 2018, p. 47). Labour unions and civil society organizations, as *Caritas*, began to advocate the need for a legislation on the subject and this need was also underlined by the Italian Constitutional Court in its ruling 46/1977 (*Ibid.*). In 1981 Italy ratified the ILO Convention No 143/1975 on Migrant Workers and, in 1986 the Foschi Law 943/1986 was adopted, providing for, among others, (1) equal treatment and full equality of rights with Italian workers, (2) foreigners' access to social and health services, and (3) family reunification. This measure was also accompanied by a *Sanatoria* covering 116.000 immigrants. Even if this law remained *de facto* unimplemented, it paved the way for a set of legislative interventions, that are now at the basis of the current Italian legal framework on immigration. In addition, due to a set of internal and international events, the late 1980s marked the onset of a new era for immigration in Italy (Colucci, 2018). Internationally, in 1985 the Schengen Agreement was signed, thus facilitating stricter controls on migration from Southern and Eastern regions and 1989 marked the end of the Iron Curtain. Looking at Italy, following, the 1989 Jerry Masslo affair<sup>15</sup>, a series of anti-racist protests erupted throughout Italy, culminating in the one in Rome on October 7, 1989, which counted more than 150,000 people, calling for a new immigration law and for a reform on refugee status recognition, strongly supported by the left-wing forces aligned with the Italian Communist Party. Migration became a constant topic in the public debate, but has given rise to contrasting approaches to it, reflected in the representation of immigrants in national media and in the programs of the different Italian political parties (*Ibid.*). The Martelli Law 39/1990 was adopted in 1990, providing for (1) the abolishment of the “geographical limitation” for asylum seekers, (2) for the establishment of various types of residence permits – self-employment, employment, tourism, worship, medical care, and study –, (3) the enlargement of the competences of the regions on immigration policies, and, although accompanied by a *Sanatoria*, (4) it advanced the government’s

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<sup>15</sup> Jerry Masslo was a South African refugee, who landed in 1988 at the Italian airport of Fiumicino, Rome. His asylum request was denied, due to Italian “geographical limitation” to the 1951 Refugee Convention. In 1989 he was murdered by 3 young men. His murder deeply affected public opinion in Italy, led to a series of demonstration and, subsequently to a reform in the asylum legislation.



commitment to overcome this practice through the elaboration of an annual program of entry flows. However, the inability of the political and administrative class to implement the law led to its failure.

### *The political conflict*

The 10-years period which followed the adoption of this law (1991-2001), was characterized by an exponential increase in migration flows to Italy, due, among others, to the Yugoslav Wars (1991-2001)<sup>16</sup>, which further polarized attitudes towards immigration. The proportion of the foreign population in Italy rose from 0.6% in 1991 to 2.3% in 2001, recording an average growth rate of 14,1%, thus consolidating the foreign presence in Italy (Colucci, 2018, pp. 104,105). On the one hand, local communities and civil society's organizations showed strong solidarity towards immigrants – Albania was the main country of origin. The Italian anti-racist movement, fighting for the protection of immigrants' rights, maintained a leading role and a unitary capacity for mobilization during the 1990s. The strong influence of the movement on the political debate and on the legislative activity, given the strong participation of immigrants and different political and social subjects, represented a *unicum* in the European panorama (*Ibid.*). However, on the other hand, the Berlusconi I Government – the first right-wing Government –, followed by the technocratic Dini Government, opted for a very harsh stance towards immigrants, as exemplified by the adoption of the Puglia Law 563/1995 providing for the deployment of the army, on the Apulian maritime border, to fight against illegal immigration. However, the political realm was also divided on immigration. The centre-right alliances, such as the *Alleanza Nazionale* [National Alliance], proposed extremely restrictive measures regarding entry, reception, and expulsion, following their European counterparts, the French *Front National* [National Front]. Centre-left parties, instead, were divided on migration. The *Partito Democratico* [Democratic Party] mainly focused on public order, security, and on the strengthening of borders. On the other hand, individual exponents of the party and parties such as *I Verdi* [The Greens] or *Rifondazione*

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<sup>16</sup> Iconic is the Vlora ship case of 07 March 1991. After the fall of Enver Hoxha's regime, Albania's emigration rose dramatically. The Vlora cargo ship docked the port of Bari, Italy with around 25,000 Albanian immigrants on board.

*Comunista* [Communist Refoundation] adopted a clearly anti-racist line in favour of immigrants' rights (*Ibid.*).

After the entry into force of the Schengen Agreement for Italy (1990) and of the Dublin Convention (1997) on asylum seekers, and due to the increase in the number of foreigners, the existing Italian legislation on the subject was recast by the adoption of the Turco-Napolitano Law 40/1998, on initiative of the Minister of Social Affairs and of the Minister of the Interior – *Democratici di Sinistra* [Democratic Party of the Left]. Although for the first-time immigration was conceived as a structural phenomenon and developments regarding the granting of citizenship and foreigners' social and economic rights were present, this law can be considered the starting point of the establishment of the so-called migration-security nexus. In fact, the Law provided for the strengthening of border controls to fight against illegal immigration, and for the establishment of the *Centri di permanenza temporanea (CPT)* [Temporary Permanence Center] to facilitate expulsions. For what concerns Italian integration policies, what emerges from the set of measures adopted in the 1990s is a demote of the social and legal status of immigrants (Perocco, 2003, p. 220). In fact, first of all, through a strong emphasis on the selection and rotation of the workforce, drawing on the German *Gastarbeiter* principle, casualization was institutionalized, which remained the trend in the following years (*Ibid.*, pp. 213-217). Secondly, this casualization was coupled with the imposition on immigrants of a policy of “assimilation without assimilation”, forcing them to adapt to the Italian society, which, however, remained fixed and prevented them from being part of it. Thirdly, a policy of ethnicization without recognition of cultural minorities was initiated (*Ibid.*, pp. 213,214). The conjunction of these 3 elements had the result of producing a “threefold separation”: in the life of the immigrant, between immigrant populations and between natives and immigrants (*Ibid.*, p. 212).

With the beginning of the new millennium, the “issue” of immigration became the focus of the political debate. Two reasons primary explained this phenomenon: the increase in migration flows – the average growth rate of immigration was 11,7 % per year in the period 2001-2011– and the fact that in Italy, a polycentric country with a diffused industrialization, immigrants were present all over the state and in various segments of the labour market (Colucci, 2018). For the first time, immigration was a central theme

during the election campaign leading up to the 2001 general election, to the point that the defeat of the left and the consequent shift of public opinion to the right were attributed by Walter Veltroni, Secretary of the Democratic Party, to three factors: immigration, security, and fiscal pressure (*Ibid.*). In fact, precisely by reintroducing the binomial “immigration-criminality”, thus replacing anti-southern racism with xenophobic racism, the centre-right coalition won, and the II Berlusconi Government was established (*Ibid.*). The translation of the election promises into practice materialized with the adoption, in 2002, of the famous Bossi-Fini Law 189/2002. This law matured, in a restrictive and worsening sense, elements already existing in the previous law, further overshadowing the 'emancipatory' ones, and enhancing the repressive and punitive others (Perocco, 2003, p. 222).

### 2.1.2 – From 2002 Bossi-Fini Law to the 2009 “Safety Package”. The casualization and criminalization of the immigrant

In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Bossi-Fini Law was passed in Italy, turning the government’s campaign promises into reality. From this moment on, it is essential to distinguish between the dynamics and measures that converge on asylum and those that affect immigrants other than refugees. Regarding asylum, major changes dealt with procedures, precisely with their simplification and with the extension of the period of stay in the CPT. The *Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati* [Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees] was also established. In the field of immigration, instead, the Law introduced numerous innovations: (1) restrictions on regular pathways to enter Italy and the reduction of the duration of residence permits, (2) the subordination of the residence permits to the employment contract, (3) restrictions regarding family members eligible for family reunification, (4) the establishment of an expulsion mechanism, and (5) the establishment of the crime of illegal re-entry. Moreover, the Law was combined with a *Sanatoria* concerning around 650,000 permits. A very harsh reaction followed the adoption of the Bossi-Fini Law; civil society’s organizations strongly denounced it, defining it as “racist, xenophobic, inhumane”, as a Law that “introduces elements of segregation for immigrants, considered servants in conditions of new slavery, thus establishing an unequivocal difference and different treatment for immigrant workers and native

workers” (Comitato Immigrati Italia, 2002). Criticism focused also on the fact that this Law further contributed to insecure immigrants’ life conditions through the establishment of more administrative procedures and of the dependence of the immigrant on the employer, due to the introduction of the “unified contract of employment and residence” (Perocco, 2003, p. 223).

The Italian immigration governance undergone other major developments in the first decade of the new millennium. Between the factors that mostly shaped it, the increase of human mobility, but also the evolution of the Common European Asylum System, at the EU level, together with the 2004 enlargement of the Union, and the relative transformation of the status of the new EU member states ‘nationals, played a crucial role (Colucci, 2018). Accordingly, EU directives adopted in the first phase of the CEAS were transposed into domestic law. For instance, the 2003 Directive on Family Reunification 2003/86/EC was transposed by Legislative Decree No. 5/2007, thus granting the right to family reunification and, in 2008 the *Centro di Accoglienza per i Richiedenti Asilo* [Asylum Seekers Reception Centre] (CARA) was established to host asylum seekers pending refugee status determination. However, in concomitance with the 2007 integration of Bulgaria and Romania in the European Union and the relative exemption of more than 1 million foreigners from the legislation tackling non-Europeans, a climate of social alarm ensued, thus leading to a further tightening of the immigration policy and to the reinforcement of its security character (Einaudi, 2010). Therefore, the actions of the new centre-right Berlusconi Government (2008-2011) focused on the one hand, on strengthening border controls and fighting against irregular migration to prevent and to contain emigration to Europe and, on the other hand, on tightening immigrants’ rights (Colucci, 2018). In the first category fell, among others, the Berlusconi-Ghaddafi Treaty of Friendship, Partnership, and Cooperation between Italy and Libya, concluded in 2008 to end disputes related to Italian colonialism and strengthen bilateral relations. Migration governance was inserted in the field of security, terrorism, and criminality, by, for instance, institutionalizing the Libyan control of migrant flows to Italian shores, thus externalizing it<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, in the field of immigrants’ rights, in 2009, the fourth

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<sup>17</sup> This practice of externalization of the control of flows to Libya, has raised human rights concerns, such as with regard to refoulement. In fact, although the two states were and are both parties to the 2000 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons<sup>17</sup>, and although the principle of non-

Berlusconi Government introduced the “safety package”, converted into law, by Law 94/2009, thus leading to the institutionalization of the binomial “public security-migration”. In fact, even if the package addressed the issue of security, it regulated in the field of immigration. Between the prescribed measures: (1) illegal stay became a crime punishable *ex officio*, by criminal offense or pecuniary penalty, instead of being an administrative offense (2) aggravated clandestine status was instituted for crimes committed by immigrants without a residence permit (3) a residence permit tax was inserted, and (4) detention in the *Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione* [Identification and Expulsion Centres] (CIE), ex CPT, was lengthened up to 180 days, also for asylum seekers. The Law, providing also for the census of Roma and homeless and for an ensemble of measures in the field of welfare, thus criminalizing poverty, contributed to spread social insecurity and xenophobia in the name of welfare. Moreover, in the field of integration, the “safety package” introduced the measure of the so-called *Accordo di integrazione* [Integration Agreement]. Accordingly, the newly arrived foreigner must sign the present agreement, whereby he/she commits to achieve specific integration goals, under penalty of invalidation of the residence permit. The primacy of the Italian-ness was established. Consequently, these recent legislative measures constituted a matter of concern not only among the civil society, but also among international monitoring bodies, as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, and United Nations ones. For instance, during Italy’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of 2010, concerns on the subject emerged. A considerable number of recommendations were addressed to Italy: amendments to the immigration law to comply with the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, the adoption of measures to protect and integrate immigrants, asylum seekers and persons belonging to minorities, as well as measures to increase the transparency of arrival and return procedures concerning immigrants and refugees, the need to tackle racism and discrimination (Human Rights Council, 2011).

### 2.1.3 – From the Arab Spring until today. The war to immigration

2011 corresponded to a radical change in the geopolitics of the Mediterranean region. The Middle-East and North Africa (MENA) region was involved in the so-called

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refoulement forms an essential protection also under customary law, Libya is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention (Ronzitti, 2009, pp. 129-130)

“Arab Spring”, a wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings, that began with Tunisia’s “Jasmin Revolution”, challenging the authoritarianism that settled in the region from the 1980s. Economic, social, and political conflicts, together with the demographic factor, the increase in the share of young people in the population and resentment for governments ‘corruption, abuse of power, the absence of independent and autonomous judiciary were among the main driving forces of the movement (Grinn, 2022, pp. 595-624). However, this destabilization of the MENA region posed new challenges to security. While some countries as Jordan or Morocco underwent pro-democracy constitutional changes, civil wars outbroke, among others, in Bahrain, Syria, Yemen and many economies of the region collapsed. As a result, and in concomitance with other reasons of a different nature, as environmental ones, soil erosion, water scarcity international South-North mobility exploded (*Ibid.*). Therefore, the share and composition of migration flows to Europe changed. In the period 2010-2011, the share of illegal border crossing along EU’s external borders rose by +35% (Frontex, 2011, p. 9).

Considering Italy, arrivals doubled, compared to the 2008 peak (Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale, 2013). More precisely, 8% of global asylum applications registered by international organizations were submitted in Italy (*Ibid.*). However, in absolute terms, it is erroneous to speak of an exodus, partly because just 12.6% of asylum applications were related to instability in the MENA. Sub-Saharan Africa remain in fact the main country of origin (*Ibid.*). In addition to the instability in the MENA region, the global economic crisis that began in 2008 also contributed to reshape the migratory landscape. As a result, the connection between immigration and unemployment increased, as did the tendency towards the demotion of foreign employees and the precariousness of their contractual conditions, thus diminishing labour as a motive for entering Italy and prompting an increase in the emigration of foreigners to other countries (Colucci, 2018). Therefore, the new migration flows primary comprised asylum seekers, thus emphasizing for the first time the difference between forced migration and economic migration. Shortcomings of Italy’s immigration policies, too scarcely focused on asylum seekers and refugees, emerged. Italy declared the “state of emergency”, and among the extraordinary measures adopted, the humanitarian residence permit was decreed and granted to those arrived from North Africa in the period January-April 2011 (Colucci, 2018).

## *The Italian management of the 2015 “refugee crisis”*

In the following years, arrivals, despite a decrease in 2012, rose, reaching around 170.000 in 2014 and around 180.000 in 2016, thus further challenging the Italian reception system (Statista, 2023) (see annex II). Following the mediatic Lampedusa shipwreck on 3 October 2013<sup>18</sup>, the centre-left coalition under the Letta Government launched the *Mare Nostrum* Operation to tackle the humanitarian emergency in the Strait of Sicily, by saving life at sea and bringing to justice human traffickers and migrant smugglers (Frontex, 2017). In 2014 the operation was replaced by the military one Triton coordinated by Frontex (*Ibid.*). Moreover, the Italian asylum and reception system undergone three major reforms, in the period 2012-2018, motivated by the economic crisis and by the humanitarian one. Regarding the latter, 2015 corresponded, in fact, to what is commonly defined as the European “refugee crisis”: more than 1.2 million people sought asylum in Europe, of which 150,000 in Italy (Eurostat, 2016). Therefore, Italy’s need to contain arrivals from MENA region was emphasized, also due to the pressure exerted by the EU. The Italian reception system entered into crisis, thus leading to the adoption of different restrictive measures concerning the right to asylum. Firstly, the Legislative Decree No 142/2015 transposed the 2013 EU Procedure and Reception Directives. Secondly, Law Minniti-Orlando (l.46/2017) narrowed the right to asylum by, *inter alia*, (1) institutionalizing the Hotspot approach, (2) abolishing the second instance for asylum seekers appealing rejection decisions and (3) establishing the *Centri per I Rimpatri* [Return Detention Centres] (CPR), thus increasing the expulsion rates. The second restriction to the right to asylum was carried out by the Salvini Decree-Law (d.l. 113/2018), which provided for provisions on public order and security. The Decree-Law (1) abolished the humanitarian protection status, (2) restricted access to accommodation, (3) lengthened the detention time in CPR – extendible up to six month –, and, for what concerns international protection (4) it introduced a list of “safe countries of origin”: countries that make the application for international protection manifestly unfounded.

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<sup>18</sup> On 3 October 2013, a fishing boat, departed from Libya, carrying around 500 individuals, mostly from Eritrea, Somalia, and Ghana, sank off the Italian Island of Lampedusa. The number of confirmed deaths is 368.

Moreover, long-resident immigrants' rights have been tightened and the offenses that result in the denial of international protection have been broadened.

### *The institutionalization of an emergency governance for a structural phenomenon*

As outcome of the 2018 general elections, “anti-immigration parties gained a sizeable growth in their share of votes and took the lead within the centre-right area” – *La Lega* [The Ligue] and *Fratelli d'Italia* [Brothers of Italy] in the lead. “The populist *Movimento 5 Stelle* [Five Star Movement] became the most voted for party in both chambers of the Parliament” (Campo & Giunti & Mendola, 2021, p. 11). The strong right-wing propaganda, emphasizing the “risk that migration can trigger a process of demographic and cultural change” and the potential threat that migrants pose to national economy and security was matched by the adoption of restrictive measures in the field of asylum and migration, further institutionalizing a restrictive model of governance, and normalizing a “state of exception” in the immigration policy (*Ibid.*, p. 12). Firstly, the legislative act adopted was that of the decree-law: a provisional measure having the force of law adopted by the Government in extraordinary cases of necessity and urgency – article 77 of the Italian Constitution –, thus bypassing the Parliament. All the decrees-law passed in the period 2018-2024 have been transposed into law, few amendments were done. Secondly, emphasis was put on externalization, bordering and securitization (Sciortino & Vittoria, 2023, p. 21). Accordingly, Decree-Law 53/2019, the so-called *Decreto Sicurezza-bis* [Security Decree-bis], in addition to the restriction of migrants', asylum seekers and refugees' rights, inaugurated a policy of “closing ports”, despite obligation arising from the United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and guidelines of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) (Pannia, 2021). In fact, considering sea rescue, the Decree provided for the possibility to “restrict or prohibit the entry, the transit or stopover of ships in the territorial sea”, for the sake of the “extraordinary need and urgency to provide measures to counter circumventing practices of international law and public order and security provisions” (article 1). This “closing port” policy was further strengthened and redefined, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and led to the establishment, by a Decree 1287/2020 of the Head of the Civil Protection Department, of the so-called *Navi Quarantena* [Quarantine ships]: floating hotspots to



perform a period of health surveillance. Persons rescued at sea and for whom no "Place of Safety", according to the IMO International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR), was indicated, were detained in these offshore and remote detention centres (Denaro, 2021, p. 43). This focus on "external re-bordering": on all the activities of boundary closure or retrenchment as well as boundary control and in boundary congruence (Popescu, 2011) to manage arrivals, remained and is still the linchpin of the Meloni Government established on 22 October 2022. The Italian Party *Fratelli d'Italia* [Brothers of Italy], led by the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, resulted in the most voted party in the country, thanks also to an anti-immigrant political agenda focused precisely on preventing illegal immigration. To achieve this goal, besides the criminalization of migration, a process of criminalization of humanitarian NGOs and SAR activities took place. The ensemble of the decrees-law adopted in 2023 shared the logic that SAR activities were a pull factor for migration, and therefore restricted it by, proscribing multiple rescue operations, despite strong condemnation from civil society (SOS Mediterranée *et al*, 2024) and criticism from, among others, the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe<sup>19</sup> and from bodies of the United Nations. In fact, for instance, in relation to the *Iuventa* SAR crew proceedings<sup>20</sup>, the UN Special Rapporteur about human rights defenders Mary Lawlord, defined the ongoing proceedings against human rights defenders from search and rescue NGOs as a darkening stain on Italy since "states that respect human rights promote the work of human rights defenders" (OHCHR, 2023). Moreover, all these measures in the field of "external re-bordering", were accompanied by a tightening concerning also other areas in the Italian immigration policy. Through the so-called *Cutro* Decree-Law (d.l. 20/2023), (1) accelerated procedures for asylum seekers originating from safe third countries were established, (2) CPR were strengthened and (3)

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<sup>19</sup> For further information look, *inter alia*: Expert Council on NGO law CONF/EXP(2023)1, (2023). *Opinion on the compatibility with European standards of Italian Decree-Law No. 1 of 2 January 2023 on the management of migratory flows*. [<https://rm.coe.int/expert-council-conf-exp-2023-opinion-italy-30-jan-2023-en/1680a9fe26>]. Visited on the 23 March 2024].

<sup>20</sup> Following SAR operations conducted by the *Iuventa* crew during 2016 and 2017, saving more than 14,000 migrants and refugees in distress in the Mediterranean Sea, four members of the crew were charged with "aiding and abetting unauthorized entry" of migrants to Italy and the boat was confiscated by Italian authorities. Preliminary hearings started in 2022 and the final ruling was issued in 2024. All the defendants were acquitted, and all charges dropped. Various NGOs, such as the ECCHR, define this case as "demonstrative of an alarming trend in the criminalization of humanitarian work, shrinking civic space in a key area of human rights defense" (ECCHR, 2024). For further information look, *inter alia*: *Iuventa Solidarity at Sea*, (n.d.). "The Case", *Iuventa-crew.org*. [<https://iuventa-crew.org/en/case>]. Visited on the 25 March 2024].

the special protection<sup>21</sup>, introduced in 2018, was strongly limited. In the field of security, Decree-Law 133/202 enacted urgent measures on immigration and international protection and for the support of security policies and the functionality of the Ministry of the Interior, as the facilitation of returns in the event of a threat to public order. Other measures, instead, centred on the externalization of migration. Emphasis was in fact ascribed to the partnership with third countries, thereby also expanding Italian geopolitical influence in the MENA region. On 16 July 2023, Italy and Tunisia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (European Parliament, 2023b) based on 5 pillars, among them migration and mobility, and, on 22 February 2024 a Protocol between Italy and Albania (Odysseus Network, 2024) regarding cooperation on asylum and migration management on Albania's territory was ratified by Law No. 14/24, allowing Italy to examine application for international protection on Albanian territory, but under Italian jurisdiction (Celoria & De Leo, 2024).

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<sup>21</sup> "The residence permit for special protection was introduced by Decree-Law 132/2018 and the prerequisites for its issuance had been extended by Legislative Decree 130/2020, converted into Law 173/2022, which had reformulated Article 19 of the Testo Unico Immigrazione (TUI). [...] Prior to the amendment introduced by Law N. 50/23, Article 19 excluded the possibility of expelling a foreigner from the national territory if the rejection would entail a violation of one's private and family life. [...]. Law No. 50/23 cancelled the prohibition of refoulement and expulsion of a foreigner on the grounds of respect for their private or family life (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2023)".

## *Section 2.2 – The Italian recent migration governance and the security theory*

### 2.2.1 – Speech acts under the Meloni Government (2022-2024)

The Italian governance of migration, since its very beginning, the 1973 Oil Shock, to present, seems to have been built around the so-called migration-security nexus. In fact, adopting a strategic approach to it, migration appears a “central dimension of a rounded security agenda”, since “security is a value that is affected by migration and, thus, by state policies to manage such movements of people” (Huysmans & Squire, 2010, p. 170). Accordingly, a critical analysis of the nexus and of the relative politics of insecurity, that is “the struggles over legitimacy of specific methods of governing the migration area and the legitimizing effects that can be derived from using security language in politics” (*Ibid.*, p. 173) appears essential. Drawing from the securitization theory, the first focus of the analysis should be the framing of migration in public discourses, since, according to the Copenhagen School, “the process of securitization is what in language theory is called a speech act” (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, p. 26). Therefore, migration narratives in the political debate, in the media and in policy-making documents, as well as their influence on public opinion should be analysed. From a temporal point of view, the reference period is that coinciding with the Meloni Government – October 2022 to present.

The perception of and discourses about migration in Italy is the result of both domestic and international factors: the country’s position in the European system of asylum and migration governance – a frontline country – [...] and the evolution of narratives on migration (Bonelli; Celoria; Pastore, 2023, p. 7).

Italy, together with Malta, is the first entry country of the EU alongside the Central Mediterranean Route (see annex VII). Four main narratives on migration are prominent in the country: the humanitarian one, the emergency one, the security one and the criminalization one (*Ibid.*, 2023.). Accordingly, the humanitarian narrative was brought to the forefront in the period 2013-2015, as with the launch of *Mare Nostrum*, and its development was mostly influenced by the emphasis of civil society’s organizations, activist groups and Catholic groups on human suffering and death at sea, together with

their solidaristic attitude towards refugees. However, this narrative was mostly limited to specific events, as the 2013 Lampedusa shipwreck or the 2023 Cutro one<sup>22</sup>. The security discourse gained momentum over it. Direct links between discourses on governing migration and discourses on security were established and this was also coupled with the criminalization of migrants and of irregular entries, as with the “security packages”, and as with the externalization of the immigration control to third countries, the 2017 Italy-Libya MoU, *inter alia*, to fight against irregular migration. Moreover, the recourse to the siege metaphor was a constant for both, right and left parties, that purposed to supersize the arrivals in order to legitimize the adoption of extraordinary measures to deal with them, as the hotspots or the “Quarantine ships”. In fact, since Italy defined itself as left alone to carry the burden of the disproportionate influx of migrants, lacking European support, arrivals started to be seen as an emergency. Furthermore, the emergency narrative was supplemented by a further criminalization of the solidarity sector, as civil society’s organizations, and humanitarian actors (*Ibid.*). NGOs were, in fact, identified as pull factors, as “sea taxis”<sup>23</sup>. This rhetoric led also to the adoption, by the Ministry of the Interior, of the 2017 Code of Conduct for NGOs involved in migrants’ rescue operations at sea<sup>24</sup> of and the one introduced by Law 1/2023, which strongly tightened their activities.

Considering the period corresponding to the Meloni Government, three of the abovementioned narratives are prominent in the framing of migration: the security, the emergency, and the criminalization one. Only with respect to Ukrainian refugees, the adoption of a humanitarian/victimizing narrative is identifiable. In fact, in the media, Ukrainian nationals are defined in emphatic terms, through the recourse of personal stories, underlying the need to offer them help and this approach is also reflected in the

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<sup>22</sup> On 26 February 2023, the boat “Summer Love”, carrying around 200 individuals, that left from Turkey, sank near the shoreline of Steccato di Cutro (Crotone, Italy). 94 individuals died, among them 35 children. Even if FRONTEX was aware of the overloaded boat struggling in bad weather six hours before the wreck, no rescue mission was launched neither by the European agency, nor by Italian authorities (Lighthouse, 2023).

<sup>23</sup> “Sea taxis” is an expression invented by former Secretary of the Italian political party *Movimento 5 Stelle* [5 Stars Movement] Luigi Di Maio, in 2017, through which he identifies NGOs’ boats as pull factors, as “sea taxis”. For further information look: Di Maio, L., (2017). “Di Maio e la polemica su ONG e scafisti [Di Maio and the debate over NGOs and smugglers]”, *TVLA7*. [<https://www.la7.it/laria-che-tira/video/di-maio-e-la-polemica-su-ong-e-scafisti-01-05-2017-211698>]. Visited on the 15 June 2024].

<sup>24</sup> The English version of the present Code of Conduct is available at: <https://www.statewatch.org/media/documents/news/2017/jul/italy-eu-sar-code-of-conduct.pdf>.

political debate and in policy documents, without implying a polarization of the political arena (*Ibid.*). Of an entirely different nature is the Italian rhetoric concerning arrivals by sea, mainly on the Central Mediterranean Route (see annex VII), amounting to 158,000 in 2023 and with Guinea, Ivory Coast, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Syria as the main countries of origin (Ministry of Labour and Social Politics, 2024, p. 1) (see annex III).

Securitization is carried out by speech acts of the Italian political élite that identify and produce the character of the enemy to elevate themselves to the “guardian of order and of good” to legitimize their action and gain advantages on the “electoral market” (Costantini, 2003, p. 147). Examples of speech acts are the 2022 election campaign of *Fratelli d'Italia* [Brothers of Italy] and statements of Italian Ministers themselves. Concerning the election campaign, an example of the political debate:

Immigration was said not to be a right, but a privilege granted by the State in relation to its own needs; every migrant who entered Italy irregularly was to be considered an illegal immigrant until proven otherwise (Echeverría & Finotelli, 2024).

In fact, since 2012, the Brothers of Italy party's birth, migration has always been a central theme for it, and it has also been instrumentalized for electoral purposes. For instance, regarding the 2022 governmental elections, the opposition against the left was built around the immigration fear:

The borders of our nations and of Europe are under attack, under the stunning pression of the pro-immigrant rhetoric of the left, which amplifies a shameful human trafficking and fills them with new desperate people, who ends up, too often to fuel criminality<sup>25</sup>.

Moreover, reflected in the Manifesto “*Pronti a risollevere l'Italia* [Ready to revive Italy]”, were centred around the naval blockade, the closure of ports, the selection of culturally similar migrants, the limitation of temporary protection for humanitarian reasons, the restriction of access to welfare for foreigners and the imposition of the principle of national preference to fight against illegal immigration and its insecurity

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<sup>25</sup> “*Le frontiere delle nostre nazioni e dell'Europa sono sotto attacco, sotto la pressione scioccante della retorica pro-immigrazione della sinistra che alimenta un vergognoso traffico di esseri umani e le riempie di nuovi disperati che, troppo spesso, finiscono per alimentare la criminalità*”. Extract of the speech of Giorgia Meloni for Agenda Espana. [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKEiXVBM4qo>]. Visited on the 20 February 2024].

potential. The recourse to the lie to build consensus through the production and spread of fear, is also a constant in the two-year period – 2023-2024 – that followed the elections. For instance, among the ensemble of slogans pursuing the securitization of migration, the statement of the Minister of Agriculture F. Lollobrigida “We cannot surrender to the idea of ethnic substitution: the Italians are having fewer children, so we replace them with someone else. That is not the way<sup>26</sup>”, pronounced on the occasion of the Cisa Congress in April 2023, acquired considerable media prominence (L’Espresso, 2023). The idea that Italy's socio-demographic balance is in danger due to the increase in the foreign population is therefore reinforced and, despite strong criticism from the opposition parties, as the condemnation from the *Partito Democratico* [Democratic Party] Secretary Elly Schlein identifying the statement as “words with a white supremacist flavour”, this conspiracy narrative is not devoid of supporters (L’Espresso, 2023).

Furthermore, securitization discourses are also conveyed by news media. Media are in fact exploited by security professionals to spread stereotypes that fuel the threat, through procedures of agenda setting and news manufacturing (Costantini, 2003, p. 148). In fact, since securitization is an intersubjective process between the authorities and an audience, media play a prominent role in the legitimization of the migration-security nexus. Lexicon and semantic choices, images and specific narratives in broadcast and online news influence the perception of immigration as a threat to security, thus shaping public opinion. Therefore, media have the potential to gain the appropriation of securitization by the population. The latest report of the *Associazione Carta di Roma “Notizie a Memoria”*, of October 2023, provides useful information on the Italian media coverage of migration and on its influence on public opinion (Associazione Carta di Roma, Osservatorio di Pavia, 2023). In 2023 Italian news concerning immigration registered an increase of + 173% with respect to 2022, with a peak in March – month of the Cutro shipwreck –, and the newspapers, where most articles have been published were: *Avvenire*, *La Stampa*, and *Il Giornale*. Newscasts also record a 134% increase in news related to migration compared to 2022. Considering the most recurring themes, the theme of migratory flows is the most recurring for both, news, and newscasts (69.4% and 74.3% respectively). However, in the news, it is followed by the theme of society and

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<sup>26</sup> “Non possiamo arrenderci all'idea della sostituzione etnica: gli italiani fanno meno figli, quindi li sostituiamo con qualcun altro. Non è quella la strada”

culture, and reception (11.5%), while, in the newscasts, it is followed by that of criminality and security (11.4%). The presence of illegal ghettos and the expulsions of migrant people in our territory, through the presentation of various news cases with foreigners as perpetrators or victims of crime is emphasized in newscasts. Moreover, with respect to lexical choices, in the last ten years, from 2013 to 2023, the presence of words linked to the lexical field of emergency and of security appears permanent. The words "emergency", "wall", "alarm", "crisis", "threat" and "invasion" appear 5590 times in press headline and the term "clandestine", a legally non-existent term fuelling negative stereotypes and prejudices, appeared 1714 times, 68 from January to October 2023. In 2023, news on newspapers front-pages showing an alarmist tone doubled compared to 2022 (9.5%). Furthermore, looking at semantic choices of both news and newscasts, in 2023, the semantic universe "migrant-immigrant-foreigner", highlighting human mobility, prevails over that of "refugee-displaced-asylum seeker", emphasizing the legal status and international protection. Moreover, for what concerns the recurrent narratives of the media-political campaign under the Meloni Government, migration processes are described through these metaphors: invasion, aggression, contamination, the "exodus" arrived on our shores, dangerous religions that threaten "our traditions", thus focusing mostly on the demographic emergency and on migrant-phobia. Among the different national newspapers, conservative and right-wing ones clearly conveys securitization discourses through their narratives. Taking for instance the Italian conservative newspaper *Il Giornale*, articles published in the last six month, since September 2023 to February 2024, are centred on (1) the siege of Italy – emergency narrative, (2) "illegal" migration and the risk of "Islamization" – security narrative, and (3) NGOs illegal activities – criminalization narrative. Peremptory terms are adopted and no empirical knowledge on the phenomenon is reflected in the resulting rhetoric *clichés* concerning migration. More precisely, following the Cutro shipwreck, *Il Giornale* stressed on the transformative potential of the increase in the number of arrivals on Italy, that, unless stopped, will turn "the besieged Italy" in "the European refugee camp" (*Il Giornale*, 2023a). At the same time, already the lexical choice with reference to irregular migration of *Il Giornale* reinforces the migration-security nexus. In fact, migrants are depicted as "clandestini [clandestine]" and "illegalisti [illegal]", despite the international law principle of non-penalization of irregular entry (*Ibid.*, 2024a). With regard to the content, *Il*

*Giornale* stress on the risk of Islamization caused by open ports policies and by the non-willingness to integrate of Muslim communities, thus reinforcing the self-other distinction and the construction of immigrants as a threat. For instance, the decision of the Pioltello School *Iqbal Masiq* to close on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2024 to celebrate the end of Ramadan<sup>27</sup>, a measure adopted to foster integration in the school, is depicted by *Il Giornale* as a “backward step” of the Italian school, as a measure of “*Integrazione al contrario* [reverse integration]”, because it imposes the submission of non-Muslim scholars to Muslim ones (*Ibid.*, 2024b; 2024c). Moreover, *Il Giornale* further conveys securitization discourses, by criminalizing NGOs, depicting them as liars, extremists who work closer to Taliban’s groups (*Ibid.*, 2023b), and who even put migrants ‘life at risk (*Ibid.*, 2024d).

Furthermore, figure I compares the securitizing discourses and public opinion, showing the relationship between the media coverage, the perception of immigrants as a threat and the presence of foreigners in Italy. Despite no correlation emerging in the first period of analysis, from 2010-onwards, the comparison between the trend of citizens' perception of immigrants as a threat to security and to public order and that of the volume of news on migration records a high correlation index (Pearson's R: 0.68). Therefore, one can hypothesises a mirroring between the two dimensions and of the potential influence of the media narrative on the perception of migration as a threat. In addition, it is noticeable how the two curves of insecurity perception and media coverage move in the same direction (in the 2014-2015- and 2018-2019-time frames), but diverge in other cases.

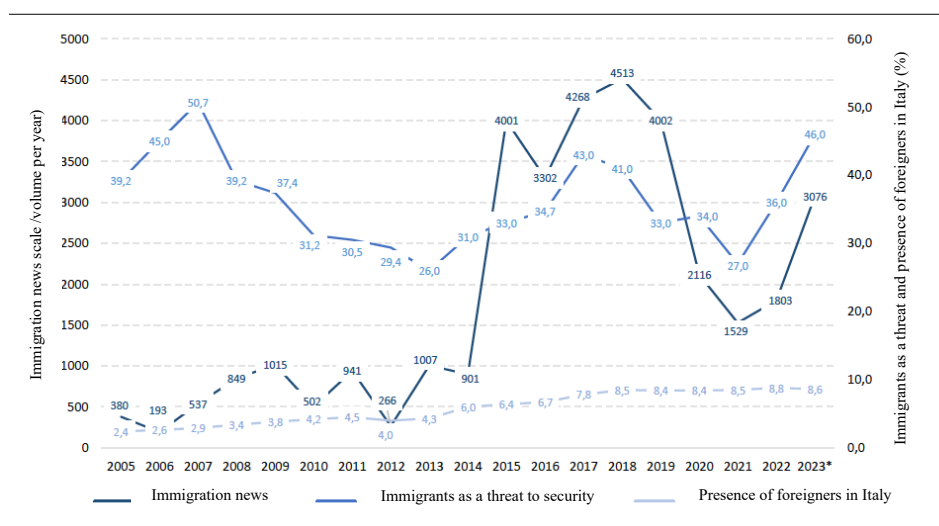
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<sup>27</sup> In Italy, freedom of religion is protected by article 19 of the Italian Constitution. The teaching of the Catholic religion in schools is optional for students and schools should accommodate diversity. Moreover, the Presidential Decree 275/1999 provides for school autonomy over certain matters on behalf of cultural pluralism. Among them is the possibility of changing the school calendar. The *Iqbal Masiq* Institute’s decision to close on the day of Ramadan is an educational decision, not a religious one, to counter absenteeism, considering that more than 40% of the school’s students are Muslim, and was adopted unanimously by the Institute's Board in the context of school autonomy. The decision gave rise to violent public debate, strong opposition from both Education Minister Valditara G. and Infrastructure and Transport Minister Salvini M., and direct threats to the school's headmaster. Consequently, following a letter from the vice-headmaster Rendani M. to President of the Republic Mattarella S., he intervened by openly declaring his support for the school and congratulating the teaching staff. Furthermore, various left-wing parties, the *Partito Democratico* [Democratic Party] *inter alia*, have been standing up for the school, defining the school’s decision ad a “choice of civility and inclusion”. For further information look: PD, (2024). “Pioltello, la surreale vicenda della scuola censurata perché inclusiva [Pioltello, the surreal affair of the school censored for being inclusive], *partitodemocratico.it*, [<https://partitodemocratico.it/la-surreale-vicenda-della-scuola-censurata-perche-inclusiva/>]. Visited on the 17 June 2024].



Consequently, it can be hypothesised that the amount of coverage only partially explains the shifts in the perception of insecurity. The narration of the migration phenomenon – e.g.: in alarming terms – remain the factor that most influence the trend of fear towards immigrants.

Figure I: Trends in migration news, trends in citizens' perception of immigrants as a threat to security and public order (%), presence of foreigners in Italy (%). Period: January 2005-October 2023.



Source: Associazione Carta di Roma, Osservatorio di Pavia, (2023, p. 48).

### 2.2.2 – Securitizing practices under the Meloni Government (2022-2024)

Given the limits of the Copenhagen School theory, as postulated in the first chapter, it seems necessary to blend speech acts with daily securitizing practices carried out by professionals of security, as postulated by the Paris School. In fact, the security is a “technique of government” and different security agencies, as border guards, immigration officers, are at the centre of the security field (C.A.S.E., 2006, pp. 458,459). Accordingly, the migration-security nexus is consolidated by bureaucratic, mundane, routinized practices carried out by securitizing actors other than politicians – the Italian Government in the present case – such as border management professionals, thus turning politicians in additional actors (*Ibid.*, pp. 443-487). For instance, law enforcement agencies, through their repressive actions, contribute to spread the mythological perception of the threat and of the need for further securitizing actions (Costantini, 2003, p. 149). Also, private agencies and correctional corporations can perform the same

functions as law enforcement agencies and, in addition, they can mobilize themselves in lobbying activities by funding think tanks or specific political parties that will pursue a more intensive securitization of social relations (*Ibid.*, p.149). Therefore, following the Paris School, the employed method to securitize is that of everyday practices and technologies, instead of discourse. Consequently, non-discursive practices, as the ones performed by the border coast guard, as surveillance technologies, as the *Centri per I Rimpatri* [Return Detention Centres] (CPR), and as the extension of security networks beyond the state borders complement the framing of migrants as a threat and strengthen the migration-security nexus.

### *Border controls: the hardening of border police and surveillance technology*

In the field of border controls, since the 2015 “refugee crisis”, border police have been hardened, surveillance technology refined, and the presence of FRONTEX officers, staff, vessels, aircrafts, and vehicles increased. Under the Meloni Government, on October 18, 2023, internal land border controls with Slovenia have been reintroduced, on the basis of Article 18 of the Schengen Borders Code, given the increase in the risk of terrorism following the crisis in the Middle East, and given the migratory pressure to which Italy is continuously subjected (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2023a). Moreover, in the same year, FRONTEX decided to enhance its support to Italy, including doubling the number of flight hours of its aircraft for monitoring purposes, or offering additional satellite images of the main departure’s areas of migrants from Tunisia (Frontex, 2023). The increase of FRONTEX’s presence on the Italian territory, due to the role of the military in addressing security issues, is therefore a practice that drives insecurity (Léonard, 2010, p. 17). However, it is not the only one factor fueling the securitization of migration. In fact, (1) the vocabulary used by the agency to depict migrants in its reports has become completely dehumanized, thus resulting in a securitized language (Bello, 2017) and (2) different activities of FRONTEX contributes to the securitization of asylum and migration as, for instance, the conduct of risk analysis or the training of the national *Guardia Costiera* [Coast Guard] (Léonard, 2010, p. 17). Moreover, insecurity is also spread by the recourse of sophisticated, advanced technology, as systems that collect personal data, which are, in fact, key components of immigration enforcement, because complex technology, together with military equipment

deployed by FRONTEX, convey the message of a fight against a security threat. (Sadik & Kaya, 2020, p. 148). In fact, asylum and immigration are integrated in policy frameworks dealing with more traditional security threats, as terrorism (*Ibid.*). For instance, the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS), which is the database containing information on potential suspects used by the Italian police, stores also biometric data collected during disembarking operations or at the time of arrival on the Italian territory (Carrer & Coluccini, 2023, p. 5). Identification procedures are increasingly invasive and tech-intensive, thus contributing to depict migrants, foreigners, and asylum-seekers “as categories of people that need to be controlled, tracked, and monitored, since they live outside of Italian borders and, therefore, allegedly outside the law (*Ibid.*, p. 43)”. Consequently, the Italian technological infrastructure contributes to the criminalization of migrants and highlights the social and cultural differences between Italian and non-Italian citizens (*Ibid.*, pp. 44-45).

### *The normalization of administrative detention*

Moreover, one of the consequences of the hardening of border police and technologies for border surveillance is the increase in the detention of international migrants in CPRs: a practice that further contributes to the reinforcement of the migration-security nexus (Bello, 2017, p. 136). In fact, “when migrants are threatened as criminals, detained in immigration centres or deported, negative attitudes towards them increase (*Ibid.*)”. Usually, deprivation of liberty is a typical instrument of criminal law. Therefore, the legitimization of the administrative detention of migrants, that is a restriction of liberty in the absence of a criminal offence, as a normal, organizational practice of migration management, contributes to diffuse stereotypes of the “dangerous foreigner, who must be confined” (Campesi, 2014). This is precisely one of the areas of the migration governance, in which the Meloni Government is investing the most, thus manifesting its choice to invest in the exclusion of migrants (Openpolis, 2023). Accordingly, Article 20 and Article 21 of the Decree-Law 124/2023 provide for the establishment of new detention facilities and the extension of the detention period up to a maximum of eighteen months. The 2023 Budget Law<sup>28</sup> provides for the increase of funds dedicated to the

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<sup>28</sup> Law 197/2022. *Legge 197/2022 recante il "Bilancio di previsione dello Stato per l'anno finanziario 2023 e bilancio pluriennale per il triennio 2023-2025 [Law 197/2022 on the "State budget for the*

expansion of CPRs by 5.39 million euros for 2023 and 14.39 million euros for 2024 and the Inter-ministerial Decree 142/2023<sup>29</sup> introduces a “bail” amounting to 4,938 euros for people who do not want to be detained (Openpolis, 2023). It should also be noted that, precisely to manage such detention facilities, private actors play a crucial role, thus becoming themselves securitizing actors. For instance, for the three-year period 2021-2023, the relevant prefectures have issued tenders for a total cost of about 56 million euros for the management of the 10 active CPRs in the country – the centre of Torino has been closed in March 2023, following protests against inhumane living conditions. Consequently, while on the one hand, private actors maximize their profit, thus turning the detention of migrants in a sector of income, on the other hand, the state, entrusting the management of detention facilities to private entities, minimizes its costs and relieve its responsibility (CILD, 2023, pp. 11-15).

### *Externalization measures*

Furthermore, another practice that falls in the field of the securitization of migration, is its externalization. More precisely, the emphasis on “transnational coordination” to prosecute smugglers and to stop their illegal profit (Euronews, 2023) contributes to the diffusion of insecurity, further criminalizing migrants, associating their flight, their free movement with a criminal event, with “illegal” migration. Indeed, externalization measures spread the idea that migrants should remain in their country of origin or transit, such as Tunisia or Libya. It is often the need to prevent terrorism that justifies transferring border control to non-EU countries. Different examples support this thesis. Among them, the Rome Process, that is the International Conference on Development and Migration held on 23 July 2023 in Rome between leaders from the MENA region, Italy, and institutions, as the IOM, the United Nation Development Program, the World Bank, is in fact focused, *inter alia*, on countering irregular migration,

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*financial year 2023 and multi-year budget for the three-year period 2023-2025]”.*

[<https://www.lavoro.gov.it/notizie/pagine/legge-di-bilancio-2023>. Visited on the 04 April 2024].

<sup>29</sup> Interministerial Decree No 142/2023. *Decreto Interministeriale No 142/2023 sulla “Indicazione dell'importo e delle modalita' di prestazione della garanzia finanziaria a carico dello straniero durante lo svolgimento della procedura per l'accertamento del diritto di accedere al territorio dello Stato [Interministerial Decree No 142/2023 on Indication of the amount and manner of provision of the financial guarantee to be borne by the foreigner during the course of the procedure for ascertaining the right to enter the territory of the State]”.*

[<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2023/09/21/23A05308/sg>. Visited on the 04 April 2024].

through the development of short-term policies to deter departures, of faster readmission and repatriation procedures, and of a further cooperation between border police (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2023b). Another example is the Italy-Albania Protocol of 2023 that, by placing immigration in the realm of emergency, contributes to fuel insecurity. The establishment of two detention centres on Albanian territory, strategic infrastructures for national defence and security, provided for by the Protocol, is a practice that outsources asylum and migration management and replicates therefore the “siege” metaphor. In fact, it contributes to the construction of the lie surrounding immigration, claiming that asylum seekers cannot be hosted in reception facilities located on the Italian land, because of their unmanageable number and because of their dangerous potential.

As a result, it seems clear that, this set of everyday practices undertaken, besides security professionals, by other actors as law enforcement agencies or private ones, reinforce the migration-security nexus in Italy.

### 2.2.3 – The emergence of spontaneous counter-discourses and counter-practices. A successful securitization?

With respect to the audience’s acceptance of the migration-security nexus in Italy, looking at the latest Standard Eurobarometer on public opinion in the European Union of Autumn 2023, question QB7, on the feelings that immigration evokes, shows that in Italy, immigration from non-EU27 is perceived by 50% of the surveyed as “total negative” and by 13% as “very negative” in contrast to that from EU Member States, which is experienced as “total negative” by only 34% and as “very negative” by only 5% of respondents<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, 51% of respondents disagree on the assumption that immigrants contribute positively to Italy and 80% is in favour of a reinforcement of EU borders with more European border guards and coast guards<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore, looking at question QA3 “What do you think are the two most important issues facing (our country) at the moment?”, in the Standard Eurobarometer 97, 98, 99 and 100, covering the period from summer 2022 to winter 2023, the perception of immigration as one of the two most important issues faced by Italy rose from 8% to 16% in June 2023 and to 17% in

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<sup>30</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 100, “Public opinion in the European Union, Autumn 2023”, QB7.1, QB7.2

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, QB8.1, QB6.2 [<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3053>]. Visited on the 1 April 2024].

October/November of the same year<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, the latest report of the European Survey on Security shows that 46% of the surveyed Italian citizens agrees on the assumption that immigration is a threat to security and public order, 35% on the assumption that immigrants are a threat to the Italian culture, identity, and religion, and 29% on the assumption that immigrants are a threat for the employment (Associazione Carta di Roma, Osservatorio di Pavia, 2023, p. 53). However, although the presence of immigrants causes feelings of fear among Italian citizens, only 6% of surveyed Italians in the European Survey on Security of 2023 considers immigrants a “priority problem” (*Ibid.*). Moreover, the emergence, albeit inferior, of discourses and practices that seem to counter the securitization process, thus questioning the Italian migration governance – its effectivity, efficiency, and legitimacy – is also observed. For instance, considering the judicial agency, its role appears, in fact, ambivalent. On the one hand, in the sector of solidarity, numerous criminal investigations against NGOs for “aiding and abetting illegal immigration”, as the 2021 proceedings against *Linea d’Ombra*<sup>33</sup>, or the criminal investigations started in January 2022 against *Mare Ionio*<sup>34</sup>, contributed to the institutionalization of the migration-security nexus by criminalizing humanitarianism (AIDA, 2022). On the other hand, different recent decision – Decision No 4557/2024 of the Italian Court of Cassation and ruling 126/2024 of the Trapani tribunal concerning the *Iuventa* case seem to counter it –. Respectively, the Court of Cassation, in its decision 4557/2024 concerning the case of the Italian private vessel *Asso 28*<sup>35</sup>, rules that Libya is

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<sup>32</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 100, “Public opinion in the European Union, Autumn 2023”, QA3 [<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3053>. Visited on the 1 April 2024]; Standard Eurobarometer 99, “Public opinion in the European Union, Spring 2023”, QA3 [<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3052>. Visited on the 1 April 2024]; Standard Eurobarometer 98, “Public Opinion in the European Union, Winter 2022-2023”, QA3 [<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2872>. Visited on the 1 April 2024]; Standard Eurobarometer 97, “Public Opinion in the European Union, Summer 2022”, QA3 [<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2693>. Visited on the 1 April 2024].

<sup>33</sup> *Linea d’Ombra* is an Italian association established in Trieste in 2019 to support migrant populations along the Balkan route. In 2021, an investigation against its founders, the psychotherapist Fornaisr, L. and the philosophy teacher Franchi, G.A. was carried out by the Trieste public prosecutor’s office for “aiding and abetting illegal immigration”. However, the charges were subsequently dismissed.

<sup>34</sup> Following the disembarkation of 27 migrants in the port of Pozzallo, on September 12, 2020, from *Mare Ionio* – a vessel of the NGO Mediterranea saving humans, the Ragusa public prosecutor’s office ordered the investigation against *Mare Ionio* for “aiding and abetting irregular immigration”, since migrants have been transhipped the previous day from the Danish motor vessel *Maersk Etienne* during a SAR operation arranged by Maltese authorities, without any preliminary agreement between the Italian and the Maltese authorities. The charges against the *Mare Ionio*’s crew have been dismissed.

<sup>35</sup> In 2018, *Asso 28*, an Italian-flagged vessel, rescued 101 migrants in the Libyan SAR and bought them back to Tripoli, following the orders of the Libyan Coast Guard, without informing the competent Coordination and Rescue Centre, and failing to identify the rescued migrants and ascertaining their

not a “safe port” and therefore the practice of handing over migrants to Libyan cost guards is unlawful (Supreme Court of Cassation, 2023). In Parallel, the Court of Trapani, in its ruling of April 19, 2024, drops all the charges against defendants in the *Iuventa* trial. “The *Iuventa* case marked the onset of a public smear campaign against civil sea rescue, aimed at legitimizing crackdowns on rescue efforts” (Iuventa, 2024). After seven years-long proceedings against the *Iuventa*-crew, the political nature of the case, evidenced by the Minister of the Interior joining as civil plaintiff, and the lack of evidence of the charges – aiding and abetting unauthorized entry – is recognised (*Ibid.*). Consequently, the judicial agency seems to impose a reconsideration of the Italian migration governance, particularly with respect to SAR activities and practices that fall in the field of externalization.

### *Grassroot counter-discourses and practices*

Beyond institutional spontaneous de-securitizing initiatives, most of the practices that aim to challenge the securitization of migration are bottom-up. Among them there are: forms of migrant resistance and social-movements, and initiatives originating in the sector of solidarity. For instance, with respect to the strengthening of CPRs, the *Rete Mai più Lager – NO ai CPR* is a clear example of forms of mobilization, aggregating different associational realities as political parties or NGOs, whose practices – demonstrations, and flash-mobs among others – show a clear opposition to the securitization process<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, dissent towards the Italian asylum and immigration governance seems to emerge not only among people experiencing displacement or actors in the solidarity sector, but also among Italian local communities and securitizing actors themselves. By way of illustration, following the Cutro shipwreck of 26 February 2023, most national daily newspapers front-page reported on the tragedy, drawing attention to its gravity, and on the responsibility of the Italian Government (see annex IV). *La Repubblica*, defined

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conditions. Therefore, the captain violated the relevant provisions of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, relevant IMO guidelines and committed a collective expulsion under the ECHR, since Libya, according to the Italian Court of Cassation is not a “safe port”.

<sup>36</sup> For further information look, *inter alia*: NO CPR (2021). “Verso una Resistenza civile quotidiana e diffusa, a difesa dei diritti delle persone migranti e non [Toward a daily and diffused civil Resistance, in defense of the rights of migrant and non-migrant people]”, *Facebook*. [[https://www.facebook.com/notes/700182897573558/?paipv=0&eav=AfZgc6WGszaS8dToLTYvdgzUw2nyCdNqv7HvjwNrrZwKOfPnb79F6Mv1r7LI4\\_sQFrU](https://www.facebook.com/notes/700182897573558/?paipv=0&eav=AfZgc6WGszaS8dToLTYvdgzUw2nyCdNqv7HvjwNrrZwKOfPnb79F6Mv1r7LI4_sQFrU). Visited on the 06 April 2024].

the shipwreck as the “massacre of women and children”, *La Stampa* as the “massacre of innocents” thus depicting immigrants as us – women, children. Condemnation towards the Italian non-intervention, and more in general the Italian migration governance, also emerged, as exemplified by the front-page of the newspaper *Il Fatto Quotidiano*: “*Migranti, l’ennesima strage: oltre 60 morti ‘si potevano salvare’*” [Migrants, yet another massacre: over 60 deaths ‘could have been saved’]. Moreover, ten thousand people, among them ordinary people, labour unions, civil society’s organizations, politicians, and majors, demonstrated on the 11 March 2023 in Cutro, united by the slogan “*fermate la strage* [stop the slaughter]” (La Repubblica, 2023).

Despite the institutionalised construction of migration as a security threat in Italy, given the set of securitizing discourses and practices promoted by different agencies, its immutability seems to be called into question. In fact, these counter-discourses, and counter-practices, albeit spontaneous, seem to advocate a re-articulation of the first and second reception governance, promoting, instead of migrants’ insecurity potential, the need for a human mobility in security.



## **PART 2 – TOWARDS DE-SECURITIZATION: HUMAN SECURITY AND THE MIGRANTS’ AGENCY**

### **Chapter 3 – De-securitizing the Italian border processes. A case study for the de-securitization of migration**

#### *3.1 – The Italian border regime: the exposure of migrants to the nondemocratic condition of the border*

##### 3.1.1 – Border security and human security

Borders are the first site where the consequences of the securitization of migration materialize. Their crossing is, in fact, an obligatory step in the journey of the migrant. Borders constitute the first contact point between the third country national and the receiving society. Moreover, borders are defined and redefined “according to contingent needs, political interests, or specific issues at stake” (Panebianco, 2021). Therefore, they are the *locus* where the process of de-securitization should initiate. The increase of border security, whether it is a consequence of the framing of migration as a threat or an autonomous, everyday practice, is the trend in Italy. However, the pursued border security results in a security for the Self – Italian citizens – at the expenses of the security of the Other – migrants.

The European border regime has often been conceived as a prime example of population management through biopolitical control, according to Rygiel (2013: 13), that sorts, via ‘regimes of citizenship as biopolitics’, entire ‘populations through the construction of desirable and undesirable citizens, non-citizens, and abject populations’ [...] Borders are the materialization of socio-political relations that map onto, and thereby reinforce class-based, gendered, and racialized differentiations, hierarchies, and segregations (Stierl, 2018, p.166).

Therefore, borders appear as “the absolutely non-democratic” or “discretionary” condition of democratic institutions “that allow control over movements and their subjects, while they are rarely subjected to control themselves” (Balibar, 2004, p. 109). Precisely, those who are outside the formal citizenship are exposed to such nondemocratic condition of the border. (Balibar, 2004, p. 117). In other terms, borders are conceived as

the product “of a construction of and by the state”, they are instituted and “they must give the state the possibility of controlling the movements and activities of citizens without themselves being subject to any control”. “The status of citizen returns to the condition of a ‘subject’, where political participation gives way to the rule of police” (*Ibid.*, p. 109). Accordingly, border security does not seem to be directly proportional with the security of human mobility. Migrants are exposed to the nondemocratic condition of bordering manifestations, thus “rending the relationship between border security and humanitarian aid and protection complex” (Fontana, 2022, p. 98). In fact, border closure policies – externalization measures outsourcing borders’ control, restrictions on NGOs activities operating in the SAR sector, restrictions on regular pathways to reach Italy, asylum seekers’ detention in hotspots or pre-removal centres, the “safe-third country” procedure, as well as the increase in border surveillance and control – increase border’s irregularisation, and migration insecurity: border regulations are inadequate to face mobility trends and their violation is indeed necessary (Panebianco, 2022).

Migrants, being irregular, are compelled to resort to criminal networks to pursue their journey. This obligation exposes them to the risk of distress, including the possibility of death. The dangerousness of smuggling operations is amplified by the reinforcement of physical fences (Fontana, 2022, p. 108). Moreover, those who are able to enter Italy are trapped in the limbo of border procedures. As a result, “overcrowded facilities, overloaded asylum systems, and wide temporal and numerical gaps between the number of incoming asylum applications and outgoing decisions” (*Ibid.*, p. 105), characterize the borders of Italy. More specifically, in 2023, out of around 150,000 people disembarked in Italy, 2000 are dead or missing (UNHCR, 2024): 1,3 out of every 100 people risk losing their life in their journey to Italy. Those who reach Italian shores, instead, are constrained in a state of “rescue-without-protection”: rejected asylum seekers remain stuck in irregularity or are returned, following patterns of “mobility in and towards insecurity”, and pending asylum seekers linger in a limbo of “immobility in insecurity” (Fontana, 2022, pp. 105,106). Consequently, displaced people are often exposed to human rights violations, at sea and on land, that are the unavoidable consequence of state violence perpetrated in the form of deportation and prolonged detention, as documented by international judicial bodies. Therefore, the Italian border management seems to be characterized by “humanitarian *vacuums*”, thus being unable “to capture the humanitarian

dimension of migration”. The present border management participates “in co-producing migrants’ vulnerability”, thus entrapping them in a condition of human insecurity (Fontana, 2022, p. 96). Accordingly, the traditional state-centric vision of security seems to be challenged: human security falls within security itself. When human security is provided, also state security is guaranteed (Panebianco, 2022, p. 2). In fact, the insecurity of human mobility questions the Italian border management since migrants’ human rights violations undermine the status of Italy itself and produce disorder not only in the lives of migrants, but also in local communities.

### 3.1.2 – The case study of Sicily

#### *Border processes*

Together with Malta, Sicily, the Italian largest island with region capital Palermo, corresponds to the first entry point for individuals embarking from North Africa to reach Europe along the Central Mediterranean Route (see annex VII). In fact, the island is known as the “*Porta d’Europa* [Gateway to Europe]”, as demonstrated by the homonymous monument in Lampedusa – a Sicilian hotspot island – realized by Mimmo Paladino in 2008 to remember all the people who lost their life in their journey to Europe (see annex V).

In 2023, Sicily remained the main Italian region of disembarkation, given its geographical position – 100 miles northeast of Tunisia –, followed by Calabria, Puglia, and Tuscany (UNHCR, 2024). More precisely, 69% of sea arrivals registered in Italy in 2023 was concentrated on the island of Lampedusa (UNHCR, 2024). Lampedusa is, in fact, located at the centre of the current migration route (see annex VII): just 61 miles away from Tunisia. However, beyond its geographical location, Sicily, and more precisely Lampedusa, experiences, from 2011 – in concomitance with the Arab Spring – onwards, a constant process of “borderization”, that is, the manufacture of borders (Cutitta, 2015, p. 196). In fact, the Sicilian Island is more ‘border’ than other Italian border spots (*Ibid.*, p. 199). Beyond its location, its high “borderization” index is explained by an ensemble “of political choices: on policies, practices and discourses that have been developed in and around the island, ‘borderizing’ Lampedusa and transforming it into the essential embodiment of the Euro-African migration and border-regime” (*Ibid.*,

p. 199). Alongside the discursive production of emergency, the sense of the Sicilian border appears to be more tangible because of two reasons related to the reception system and to border procedures. The Italian reception system, despite being structured in different phases, is centred on the Reception and Integration System (SAI). However, first reception occurs primarily through the *Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* [Extraordinary Reception Centres] (CAS), which have been firstly established in 2014 (AIDA, 2023). Although CAS are temporary centres for the reception of asylum seekers, to be implemented in cases of an exceptional number of arrivals and of the consequent saturation of government centres, they have become the ordinary method of reception of asylum seekers in Italy – and in Sicily. Second reception occurs thorough the SAI, managed by municipalities and with the support of third-sector organizations, which should guarantee, beyond the fulfilment of basic needs, individual paths for socio-economic integration. In Sicily both systems are active and, besides them, after the 2015 “refugee crisis” the hotspot approach has also been implemented on the island, thus increasing its “borderization” index. Those who arrive to Italy are, in fact, concentrated in remote restricted areas. Currently, three hotspots are active: in Lampedusa, Pozzallo and Messina. Italian authorities work together with the European FRONTEX, Europol and the European Asylum Support Office for the management of activities.

Regarding procedures to seek asylum, in Italy different procedures exist: the regular procedure, the Dublin procedure, the border procedure, and the accelerated procedure. It is not possible to apply for international protection from abroad and the competent authorities to examine asylum applications are the *Commissioni Territoriali per il Riconoscimento della Protezione Internazionale* [Territorial Commissions for Recognition of International Protection]: administrative bodies under the Ministry of the Interior (AIDA, 2023). Among the procedures, of particular importance is the border procedure. It has been established in 2018 and reformed in 2023 and provides for the possibility to seek asylum directly at the border or in transit areas for individuals having evaded or attempting to evade border controls and those originating from safe-third countries (*Ibid.*, 2023, p. 21). This procedure is carried out mostly at sea borders. In Sicily six provinces, that of Caltanissetta, Ragusa, Siracusa, Catania, Messina, Trapani and Agrigento, are considered border or transit areas, where this special procedure can take place, thus contributing to the “borderization” of the island. Since April 2023, third-

country nationals, originating from Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cape Verde, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kosovo, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Morocco, Senegal, Serbia, Tunisia, are bound by this procedure.

Moreover, another example of the top-down “borderization” of the island is the 10-Point Plan, proposed by the European Commission President von der Leyen in September 2023, after her visit to Lampedusa (European Commission, 2023). The set of immediate actions put forward, even if exercised in full respect of fundamental rights and international obligations, increases the concentration of border functions on the Sicilian Island, thus making unwallled borders more visible and transforming the population and the anthropic landscape at the border (Cutitta, 2015). In fact, the Plan provides for, among others: (1) the reinforcement of return procedures, through the increase of the support by Frontex, through the enhancement of border surveillance, and through the increased recourse of accelerated border procedures, (2) the issue of entry bans, using the safe country of origin concept, (3) the increase in the registration in the Schengen Information System, and (4) the enhancement of anti-smuggling actions by Europol along the route to Tunisia and onward to Lampedusa. Therefore, this set of measures contributes to the high degree of “borderness” of Sicily, thus continuing to change the shape, operational modalities, and places where the territorial borders manifest themselves (*Ibid.*). However, this process of “borderization” of the Sicilian Island is not without consequences in terms of compliance with human rights obligations since border security and human security are not directly proportional.

### *Human rights violations*

Reports from humanitarian organizations and national and international judicial bodies continue to underline the grave consequences of border processes in place in Sicily. Among them, forced returns from island territories, pushback operations in neighbouring waters and unlawful detention emerge as the main practices that fuel human insecurity (Cutitta, 2015). This makes it evident that increasing border security does not coincide with a rise in human security. In fact, during migrants’ journey to Italy, upon arrival, and in accommodation centres and CPRs, human insecurity and human rights violations are recorded, as stated by Borderline Europe Palermo Team.

Upon arrival people do not know what is happening to them, family separation occurs in Lampedusa, people are left to fend for themselves without shelter and care, those who are brought to accommodation centres do not receive any information legal advice or accompaniment, and often they experience physical violence from authorities<sup>37</sup>.

More precisely, regarding returns and pushbacks operations, Italy is mostly involved in the practice of indirect refoulement. In fact, following the ECtHR ruling in the case of *Hirsi Jamaa and Others v. Italy* – Application No. 27765/09 – direct pushback operations largely ceased. Indirect refoulements, that are the removal to a third country from which the individual may then be removed to the country in which he faces a real risk of the proscribed ill-treatment (European Commission, n.d.,f) – to Libya and, more recently to Tunisia – are instead recorded (Alarm Phone, 2024). To circumvent arrivals on Sicilian shores, a pushback regime by proxy has been implemented. Like the Libyan model, efforts are underway to bolster the capabilities of the Tunisian coast guard, establish a coastal surveillance system, establish a functional Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, and designate a Tunisian Search and Rescue region (*Ibid.*). Examining the initial quarter of 2024, data indicates that in January, the Libyan Coast Guard intercepted 489 individuals. In February, the number of intercepted people surged to 4,226, with 35% of them repatriated to Libya, while 64% to Tunisia. March witnessed a further increase, with 7,147 individuals intercepted. Of these, 38% were sent back to Libya, 60% to Tunisia, and 2% to Egypt (Borderline-europe, 2024).

Considering the Sicilian reception system, primary concerns revolve around overoccupancy, deteriorated living conditions and mismanagement problems (AIDA, 2023, p.132). In addition, legislative interventions of 2023 have strongly reduced services for asylum seekers in accommodation centres, limited health care assistance, social assistance and linguistic- and cultural-mediation, and cancelled the legal and psychological support (*Ibid.*, p. 17). Given the continuous mismanagement problems, Decree-Law 20/2023 provided for the possibility, by 2025, to entrust the management of the Lampedusa hotspot to the Italian Red Cross, in derogation to rules on tendering procedures (*Ibid.*, p. 155). As of 30 September 2023, the hotspots' occupancy in Sicily was of 370 places, and the one of reception centres located near hotspots of 4,300 places

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<sup>37</sup> E-mail interview with the Borderline Europe Palermo Team, May 28, 2024.

(EPRS, 2023, p. 7). Focusing on the hotspot of Lampedusa, operative since September 2015, despite its official capacity of 389 places, during the two-year period 2022-2023, up to 3,200 people were hosted in the hotspot, thus resulting in overoccupancy (AIDA, 2023, p. 154). Moreover, besides the fact that foreigners in the Lampedusa hotspot are subject to a *de facto* deprivation of personal liberty, the centre experiences constant power outages, shortages of food, clothing and running water, thus leading to severe health and hygiene issues (*Ibid.*). The conditions on the hotspot have also been denounced, in March 2023, by the ECtHR, in the case of J.A. and Others v. Italy – Application No. 21329/2018. The court holds, in fact, that Italy violates Article 3 ECHR (prohibition of torture), Article 5 ECHR (right to liberty and security) and Article 4 Protocol 4 (collective expulsion of aliens). In the present case, the applicants – Tunisian sea-migrants – were detained for ten days in the hotspot centre of Lampedusa in overcrowded conditions of detention and under abusive physical and psychological treatment by the authorities, as outlined also by the UN Committee against Torture in its 2017 report on Italy<sup>38</sup>. Their detention occurred “without clear and accessible legal basis and in absence of reasoned decision”, thus precluding applicants from challenging the lawfulness of “*de facto* detention”. The court states also that hotspots are overused by the government to prevent migrants from reaching safe destinations. Moreover, applicants have been forcibly removed to Tunisia “without proper regard to their individual situation when issuing refusal-of-entry and removal orders” and without having the possibility to appeal against the decision.

Sicily, and more precisely Lampedusa, clearly exemplifies the nexus between border security and human insecurity. The island embodies “all the functions of the Italian and EU border concentrated in one place”, showcasing the comprehensive impact of border processes. Consequently, repercussions of migration securitization, including human rights violations and the production of vulnerability among displaced individuals, are increasingly evident in this geographical site (Cutitta, 2015, p. 199). The higher the ‘borderization’ index of the border territory, the more severe the consequences in terms of human rights violations and vulnerability production. Thus, Sicily emerges as a crucial *locus* for initiating de-securitizing efforts. Following the identification of this pivotal location, the next step towards enhancing human security and shifting away from the

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<sup>38</sup> Relevant extracts of the report are included in the ruling of the court.

current security paradigm involves redefining the referent object and de-securitizing actors. Human mobility should become the de-securitization's referent object, emphasizing the need to prioritize the well-being and rights of migrants. Additionally, the actors responsible for undoing the process of security should also be redefined. Previously securitized individuals, that are migrants themselves, along with humanitarian actors, now take on the role of de-securitizing agents, working towards promoting inclusivity, dignity, and human rights within border and migration policies and practices.



### 3.2. – *Humanitarian and political practices: the counterweight to the securitization of migration*

#### 3.2.1 – NGOs and CSOs humanitarian and political borderwork

The first and more evident counterweight to security-driven migration discourses and practices are humanitarian practices performed by NGOs and civil society. In fact, humanitarian actors contribute to challenge the present border regime, thus proving “that border control is a controversial phenomenon” (Panebianco, 2022, p. 10), and they fill the humanitarian *vacuums* of the Italian border management. NGOs located in the state periphery, intervene “in defence of individual migrants, thus considering individual human beings as the referent object of security” (Panebianco, 2021, p. 433). Humanitarian and political borderwork is a constant at the borders and they both contribute to the re-politicization of the migration and border regime (Calarco, 2024). For what concerns humanitarian borderwork, NGOs urgency-based practices provide migrants with “rescue at sea, first aid, basic provisions, including medical care, food, water and shelter”. Long-term humanitarian practices are instead oriented to the inclusion and eventually integration of newcomers in local communities at the peripheries (Panebianco, 2021, p. 432). Political borderwork consists in: actions as monitoring the situation and the practices of authorities, defending migrant rights, denouncing, and criticizing the current restrictive migration and border regime and campaigning for more openness (Calarco, 2024, p.60). Precisely throughout this work, “NGOs are able to shape migration policy-making processes and to influence the policy agenda in order to improve migrants’ ‘inclusion’”. A contestation of the European – and national – space of control is exerted, thus contrasting with the “judicial and political institutions, [...] making the Mediterranean a battleground in which EU and national restrictive policies are questioned and contrasted” (*Ibid.*, p. 60). In parallel, citizens themselves through everyday practices of solidarity contribute to challenge the European and national border regime. Acts of protest and resistance, as activism and advocacy for migrants’ rights, represent, in fact, alternatives to more institutionalized practices (*Ibid.*, p. 60).

Keeping the focus on humanitarian actors, in Sicily, a multitude of NGOs and humanitarian third sector organizations are involved in activities that challenge the status

quo of the current border regime, advocating for migrants' human rights and denouncing arbitrary and exclusionary practices. At sea, rescue operations are carried out, besides the competent coast guard, by different sea rescue NGOs and CSOs. A veritable civil fleet exists (Borderline-europe, 2024). Sixteen NGOs, *Mediterranea Saving Humans*, *Médecins sans Frontières*, *Sea-Watch*, *Sea-Eye* and *Compass Collective* among others, currently compose the Mediterranean civil fleet and, since January 2024, 1,186 people *en route* to Italy were rescued, despite strong obstructionism from the Italian Government (*Ibid.*). The support to migrants continues also on the Sicilian land where numerous solidarity examples and forms of civil resistance, carried out by Italian citizens, to the present border regime exist. For instance, the *Maldusa* cultural association, works to document and denounce border violence, through qualitative research, and to create collective webs and networks of grassroots resistance, through the promotion of cultural events, thus aiming to challenge the narrative of the “emergency” (Maldusa, 2023). Moreover, *Maldusa* “seeks to counter-map and counter-monitor what happens at the border – e.g., irregular detention – by listening to those who experienced the crossing [...], amplifying their voices and their demands”. The aim is to “deconstruct the image of the Mediterranean Sea merely as a deadly space, as a space of violence, non-assistance and selective visibility” and to avoid the reproduction of a misleading spectacularization of the border regime. (*Ibid.*, p. 7). Additionally, third sector organizations provide migrants with legal-, psychological-support and cultural mediation. For instance, the organization *ARCI Porco Rosso*, based in Palermo, began in 2016 the “*Sans-Papiers*” project to provide legal, bureaucratic, administrative social support, assistance in the search for housing solutions, information on health and care services, on education, training, and employment<sup>39</sup>.

Solidarity actors play therefore a dual role: they facilitate the de-securitization of the figure of the migrant through their speech acts, while concurrently revitalizing the re-politicization of the border regime by raising awareness on human rights abuses and state violence experienced by migrants, thus making these issues entering the public debate (Calarco, 2024, p. 112). Within the spectrum of humanitarian and political initiatives

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<sup>39</sup> For further information look, *inter alia*: Porco Rosso, (n.d.). Sportello Sans Papiers, *arciporcorosso.it*. [<https://arciporcorosso.it/sportello-sans-papiers/>]. Visited on the 05 Mai 2024].

undertaken by NGOs, monitoring activities and the support to unauthorized movements of people demonstrate a de-securitizing potential. Both practices, sharing a rights-based approach, seek to respond to humanitarian needs and to denounce and raise awareness on the deficiencies of the present border regime, with the goal of advocating for and lobbying towards its transformation (Calarco, 2024).

### 3.2.2 The case of Borderline Europe and Alarm Phone.

#### *The case of Borderline Europe: monitoring projects.*

Borderline Europe – human rights without borders e.V. is an NGO, founded in 2007, based in Berlin with two branches: one in Palermo, Sicily, and one on Lesbos, Greece. The association offers civil resistance against the foreclosure of the “Fortress Europe”.

Our goal is ... to expose the increasingly restrictive European migration policies and their brutal effects to a broad public. We want to create an active, political and critical awareness of the universality of Human Rights, which will counteract the racist structures and the deadly consequences of these walls-up politics. With our work we set a sign of solidarity, because humane solutions can only be found if we also have the courage to take a stand and become active (Borderline-europe, n.d.,a).

For what concerns the activities performed by the branch in Sicily, Borderline Europe has primarily focused, since 2011, on monitoring various practices. This includes the monitoring of the arrival of migrants to the island and their engagement with the asylum process, thereby offering a grass-root narrative of migration to Sicily (Borderline-Sicilia, n.d.,a). “Particular attention is devoted to practices carried out by institutional and private agents relating to the lodging, reception and detention of migrants, as well as access to services” (*Ibid.*). Among the various monitoring initiatives, the association is presently engaged in two distinct projects: “Invisible” and “Mem.Med”. The first one, carried out in cooperation with NGOs ARCI Porco Rosso and Sans Papiers Drop-In aims to make visible the disfunctions of the reception system in Sicily (Borderline-europe, n.d.,b). The project further consists in the publication every two weeks of reports called Scirocco concerning information and updates about the situation of refugees and migrants

in Italy. Moreover, since 2021, monthly reports are also published on arrivals, rescue, push- and pullbacks occurring on the Central Mediterranean Route (see annex VII), as part of a collaboration with the sea rescue organization Mediterranean Saving Humans (Borderline-europe, n.d.,c). Mem.Med, *Memoria Mediterranea* [Mediterranean Memory], is, instead, a cooperation project between many entities that focus on the people who have not made it through the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea (Memoriamediterranea, 2023). The overall goal of the project “is to deal consistently and effectively with the migration issue in the Central Mediterranean, by focusing the attention and efforts on the issue of the dead and missing in the Mediterranean Sea” (*Ibid.*, p. 4). Therefore, support and legal advice is provided for the management of paperwork related to the search and possible identification of missing persons, psychological support is provided to families missing family members and heterogeneous activities of advocacy, awareness-rising, socio-political critique, and scientific research are promoted (*Ibid.*). Moreover, the project supports practices of active memory, social and restorative justice, thus working to create a collective Mediterranean memory. In fact, “testimonies of people living or surviving violence and border violations” are collected “to create an audio-visual archive of life stories of the disappeared migrant people”, whose value is denied by the border regime (*Ibid.*, p. 46).

To what extent precisely do these monitoring activities contribute to the de-securitization of migration? Both monitoring activities represent forms of solidarity, relying on the will of ordinary people – volunteers – and rooted in the public sphere, that contest the existing migration-security nexus along the Sicilian border. They construct a bulwark against systematic exclusionary, and therefore undemocratic, practices of governmental authorities (Calarco, 2024, p. 112). A project like “Invisible” provides access to reliable information, making abuses public, and consequently facilitating the accusation of systematic violations. It also exerts political pressure, in the form of dissent, to the current border management. Moreover, monitoring operations by non-governmental bodies gain significance when considered within international human rights monitoring mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review. NGOs are key stakeholders in reviewing state practices and their human rights records during UPR Working Group sessions. A poor human rights record increases international pressure on the state to change its practice and, since this UN mechanism is political, it increases the

politicization of the issue – in the present case human mobility –, thus contributing to its de-securitization. Even more significant, in the process of undoing security, is the project “Mem.med”, due to its attention to collective memory. This project not only responds to the demand of individuals who have lost their family members for truth and justice, for the right to know and for the acknowledgment of psychological suffering, but it also constructs a bottom-up narrative of a counter-history of migration policies and of the function of the borders (Memoriamediterranea, 2023, p. 27). Therefore, a new framing of migration is pursued, deconstructing the securitizing narrative that portrays migrants as a threat, and instead depicting them as individuals like *us* – woman, father, workers, student (Huysmans, 1995, pp. 66,67). The mainstream narration of migration composed of numbers, statistics, specific lexicon, and semantical choices stemming from the field of emergency and security is countered. By depositing signs, lived experiences, wrenching stories from oblivion, and converting numbers into names, memory becomes an act of political vindication, demonstrating that human mobility cannot be managed in a restrictive and punitive way and ensuring that these existences and violence are never forgotten (Memoriamediterranea, 2023, p. 27). Both monitoring activities wield influence over legislation and policy, while also actively participating in shaping the discursive environment and influencing public attitudes.

*The case of Alarm Phone: the support to “unauthorized” movements of people.*

Alarm Phone is a self-established hotline for refugees in distress in the Mediterranean Sea, established in 2014 by activist networks and civil society actors in Europe and North Africa. Its objectives, divided into short- and long-term goals, encompass ensuring the enforcement of prompt rescue missions and preventing human rights violations. Additionally, Alarm Phone advocates for an “open border” approach to human mobility and freedom of movement for all, through mutual solidarity in the Mediterranean. One of the regions where the project operates is precisely the Central Mediterranean Sea – between Libya/Tunisia and Italy – and activists are based, *inter alia*, in Palermo and Tunis.

Our main objective is to offer boat people in distress an additional option to make their SOS noticeable. The Alarm Phone documents the situation, informs the coastguards, and, when necessary, mobilises additional rescue support in real-time. This way, we can, at least to a certain extent, put pressure on the responsible rescue entities to avert push-backs and other forms of human rights violations against refugees and migrants at sea (Alarmphone, n.d.,a).

At the same time, Alarm Phone provides also objective information and shares experiences regarding the risks, rights, and vital safety measures to take at sea for people who are to cross the sea (Alarmphone, n.d.,b). The provided information is divided into three categories: “when you decide to leave”, “at sea”, and “once on the mainland”. For instance, information concern: (1) legal entry requirements and conditions under which departures are considered unauthorized, (2) what to expect and how to prepare for the crossing – e.g., buy a life vest and supplies, check the navigation and communication equipment, do not get on board an overloaded or damaged boat –, (3) asylum and detention procedures (*Ibid.*). Safety-at-sea leaflets are distributed and publicized for people on the move, i.e., people experiencing displacement, migrants included. Migrants can also access emergency contacts and the alarm number via the Alarm Phone website. After alerting the coast guard of their distress situation, they can use the number to make their alarm noticeable. The service is active 24/7. Alarm Phone can follow up on the competent authorities’ response and protest the absence of a prompt rescue operation or if refoulements are carried out (*Ibid.*). Irregularities committed by competent authorities are publicly denounced and disseminated through the media. Moreover, besides the direct and indirect support to individuals crossing the sea, Watch the Med Alarm Phone is also involved in monitoring activities through reporting and investigation practices.

Therefore, the support that Alarm Phone provides to people on the move, whose journey, due to restrictive and exclusionary human mobility policies, is often unauthorized, represents a form of response to the EU securitizing migration and border management, serving as a counterforce. The initiative operates as watchdog to border controllers, through the follow-up of rescue operations and public denounce in case of failure. Alarm Phone advocates for the accountability of coast guards, thereby diminishing justifications that security professionals may use to avoid conducting rescue operations or complying with relevant maritime jurisdiction, migrants' rights at sea, and

the right to seek asylum. In addition to opposing the securitizing border regime, Alarm Phone contributes to the de-securitization of migration by advocating for the recognition of the fundamental right to freedom of movement for all individuals. Therefore, the dominating security narrative and practice – security for the Self – is countered for the sake of an individual right to security which is not subordinated to any state or citizenship. The Alarm Phone number eliminates distinctions between migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, as well as between individuals originating from safe third countries and those who do not, and among vulnerable and non-vulnerable individuals. This collective initiative recognizes migrants as part of the “belonging” and re-identifies them with a universal right-entitled category (Aradau, 2004). As a result, the support to unauthorized human mobility possesses the potential for a social transformation. On the one hand, this action can be interpreted as an initiative aimed at combating the criminalization of migration, given the abolition of the dichotomy between “voluntary” and “forced” migration (Stierl, 2018). On the other hand, precisely the fact that volunteers have established this SOS number also influence perceptions of the Self-Other binomial because of the co-presence, among volunteers, of ordinary people with and without a migratory background. The bringing together of local community members with newcomers and longstanding migrants of different ages, exert an indirect yet significant impact on the social identity and representation of border communities. This stimulates a reconsideration of borders as dynamic spaces for interaction instead of exclusion.

### 3.3 – *Towards a successful de-securitization of border processes*

#### 3.3.1 – De-securitization needs to penetrate the political élite

The humanitarian and political borderwork performed by actors of the solidarity sector challenges the representation and the institutionalization of migration as a security threat for the referent object. On the one hand, non-governmental organizations make visible and public the non-effectivity of securitization, in terms, for instance, of human rights costs, as highlighted by their shadow reports. On the other hand, initiatives such as Mem.Med or the actions performed by the NGO Alarm Phone call for an ethical-political judgement of the “organization of the political community organized through security practices” (Huysmans, 1998a, p. 572). Accordingly, security is interpreted in a self-reflective way: “foreigners are no longer an objective danger which triggers a search for the most efficient and effective way of protecting the national form of life from destruction”. The danger of migration is “a socially manufactured problem which receives its security qualities from the application of specific techniques, such as policy or defence, to the phenomenon of migration” (*Ibid.*). Therefore, securitization is questioned, and de-securitization becomes “a political strategy which challenges the fundamentals of the political realist constitution of the political community head on” because of two reasons. Firstly, “one cannot ethically justify an organization of the political community articulated through security practices”. Secondly, securitization “is an ineffective way of dealing with the question of migration” (*Ibid.*, p. 574). Consequently, an act of de-securitization unmakes conceptualizations of the political. For what concerns migration, it translates into “we do not longer accept that X is an existential threat to Y” (*Ibid.*, p. 576). De-securitization envisages a reconfiguration of the political community’s structure. However, to succeed it needs to penetrate the political élite. Accordingly, collective actions performed by non-governmental actors and by migrants, even if oriented to the removal of migration from the security sector, are insufficient to perform a successful and long-lasting de-securitization move (Huysmans, 1998a; Vuori, 2011). They render visible “how modes of de-securitization can appear in a securitized environment” (Huysmans, 1998a, p. 574) but, alone, they cannot permanently end securitizing dynamics. In fact, de-securitization, to be successful, should imply the “termination of institutional facts of a securitized issue” (Vuori, 2011, p. 191). The



constitutive elements of securitization dynamics should be transformed. Without their termination, de-securitization may occur, but it cannot be exhaustive. Advocacy and lobbying activities influence the audience of the process of securitization – the Italian citizens – and the authorities performing it – governmental figures. NGOs’ collective actions advocate for a transformation in the current migration and border management, but to be effective, they need to be followed by the adoption and implementation of concrete top-down measures by securitizing actors themselves to permanently reverse the representation and institutionalization of migration as a security threat. Therefore, to decrease, and possibly end, securitization patterns, a set of policy recommendations is addressed to Italian institutional actors, suggesting both discursive and practical measures to be adopted. The recommendations centre on the increase of human security in border processes. Two main reasons explain the focus on human security. Firstly, by diminishing the level of human vulnerability, the legitimization of security exceptional measures would naturally decrease. As confirmed by Borderline Europe Palermo Team, it would spread “the idea that migrants are people just like us, with plans, ideas for life and a right to be able to live”, thus de-securitizing migration<sup>40</sup>. Secondly, the adoption of new political decisions oriented towards a human mobility in security would automatically reduce the exclusionary mechanisms inherent to border crossing to which foreigners crossing them are subjected. Measures aimed at dismantling the institutional production of social exclusion and insecurity, at reducing immigrants’ institutionally generated precariousness, and at decriminalizing them would therefore dismantle the nexus which has been created between international mobility, illegality, and social dangerousness.

Regarding the process underlying the formulation of these policy recommendations, the humanitarian and political borderwork of non-governmental organizations constitute the primary source. In fact, only a deep understanding of the human insecurity resulting from the present border management allows the drafting of efficient and effective suggestions. Therefore, a personal communication with the Palermo-team of the NGO Borderline Europe has been undertaken, in the form of e-mails and a written questionnaire, to understand where the highest levels of human insecurity are recorded, and to understand the primary needs advocated by the NGO for devising an

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<sup>40</sup> E-mail interview with the Borderline Europe Palermo Team, May 28, 2024.

alternative to the current border and migration management. From this personal communication it emerged, once again, the necessity to replace the current border defence, focused on providing presumed security to citizens, by border processes focused on people as such. Therefore, the present border management requires to be rethought from its very foundation. The basis of this refoundation should be the free movement of people, conceived as a universal right<sup>41</sup>. In fact, an open border approach to human mobility, that is the absence of constraints to human mobility, with the exception of justified restrictions – e.g.: to keep out terrorists or invading armies – (Stierl, 2018, p. 196) will make the process of migration safer, reducing, for instance, deaths at sea and at land borders, depriving genuine human traffickers of their basis for work and ensuring to people the right to return home, thus reding the process of migration more fluid, as affirmed also by the Borderline Europe Palermo Team.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.3.2 – Policy recommendations: discursive and practical suggested measures to increase human security in border processes

The recommended actions to undertake for enhancing human security in border processes are divided into discursive and practical measures, categorized according to the phase of the migration journey to which they relate.

With respect to the framing of migration, the instrumentalization of human mobility should end. Migrants should not be considered a security risk *per se* and, at the same time, the government should refrain from creating the security problem through the discursive criminalization of immigrants. Moreover, narratives criminalizing smugglers and civil sea rescue should stop. In fact, no trafficking network will be dismantled through the arrest of traffickers, and civil sea rescue is not a smuggling practice. It is the direct consequence of the failure of governmental SAR efforts, provided for in binding international law.

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<sup>41</sup> For further information look, *inter alia*: Carens, J. H., (1987). Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders, *The Review of Politics*, 49(2), 251–273. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1407506>]. Visited on the 31 Mai 2024]

<sup>42</sup> E-mail interview with the Borderline Europe Palermo Team, May 28, 2024.

- (1) Governmental institutions are recommended to conduct data collection on periodic basis and refer to objective collected data in their speech acts about migratory dynamics.
- (2) Public institutions should avail themselves of data collected by activities of non-governmental actors, such as monitoring reports. NGOs requests addressed to Italy should also be considered.
- (3) Governmental officers should refrain from adopting improper language with no legal foundation. For instance, the term “*clandestino/illegale* [clandestine/illegal]” is not a legal language. Therefore, during institutional speech acts, the emphasis should be on the legal status of migrants and on international protection, rather than on vague legally erroneous classifications.

Regarding non-discursive measures, they should focus on the reception system – sea rescue, first and second reception – and on asylum procedures. For what concerns the former, recommendation should mainly address the role of Frontex and immigrant detention. In fact, according to the Palermo Office of Borderline Europe, “major human rights violations are inherent to the work of FRONTEX itself”. Frontex does not rescue people as it claims; “its border defence work is physically and psychologically brutal: always in the name of presumed security”. The Palermo Team also argues that practices, as the appointment, in June 2021, of a Fundamental Rights Officer for FRONTEX are a mask, because “human rights standards are not open for discussion, they must be fulfilled without ifs and buts. It cannot be that people ‘celebrate’ when FRONTEX gets a human rights commissioner”. Moreover, the German NGO reports high levels of human insecurity in the practice of immigrants’ detention. Remote reception centres, such as hotspots, increase immigrants’ exclusion and isolation. In addition, often no information is provided to people upon arrival and in reception centres, where immigrants are brought “without accompaniment, information, and legal advice”. “Migrants are left to complete uncertainty about their own lives and what to do next”, asserts the Palermo Team of Borderline Europe, and this happens also in CPRs, where people often do not know they are in detention pending deportation. This is compounded by the material living conditions in reception centres, which are often overcrowded, by the lack of transparency

and communication between managers of the various reception facilities, by the absence of a central administration, and by the presence of untrained staff, especially in the CAS<sup>43</sup>.

- (4) Italy should comply with ratified international instruments and customs related to rescue at sea and refugee law.
- (5) FRONTEX should be abolished.
- (6) Since an abolishment of the EU agency FRONTEX, or at least its downsizing, would cut the budget allocated to it by EU Member States, spending on border protection should be redirected towards services and resources for migrants, social services, welfare, health, education and transitioning towards a low-carbon economy (#AbolishFrontex, (n.d.)).
- (7) Detention practices in remote centres, hotspots or CAS, as a method of reception should, end.
- (8) Information about procedures and about “what is happening” should be provided to individuals disembarking in Italy, to reduce their uncertainty about their lives and about “what to do”<sup>44</sup>.
- (9) Communication between managers of the various facilities and transparency should be improved and efforts should be undertaken to enhance the organization of reception, possibly providing for a central administration of the SAI and the CAS. No grant of the facilities to private entities should be accepted.
- (10) Specific training programmes for officers should be provided. These training programmes should include special clusters on human rights, on legal provisions in force against racial discrimination and profiling, in order to avoid racially motivated misconducts by immigration officers and by the police.
- (11) In the field of second reception, an alternative residence security and decentralized accommodation for a possible integration should be ensured.

Regarding asylum procedures, the focus should be on ending the limbo of irregularity and insecurity that asylum seekers face and ensuring compliance with international, regional, and national refugee’s law.

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<sup>43</sup> E-mail interview with the Borderline Europe Palermo Team, May 28, 2024.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

- (12) Refugee status determination should comply with the principle of non-penalization, of non-refoulement and of non-discrimination which are general principles of law pursuant to article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice. Moreover, this process, which is an effort in recognition, should follow the guidelines laid out in the relative 2019 UNHCR Handbook. Accordingly, asylum seekers are entitled to obtain the necessary guidance throughout the entire process of recognition of their status. A clearly identifiable authority should be competent for the process, documents should be issued within reasonable times, specific safeguards, such as those related to age, and the right to appeal should be put in place, and the benefit of the doubt should apply when assessing asylum seekers' evidence supporting their claims.
- (13) The refugee status determination should be an individual process. Accelerated and non-individual asylum procedures and the rejection of applications based on the continuously expanding list of safe third country and safe countries of origin should end.
- (14) This list should be abolished to end indirect forms of refoulements. In this respect, externalization measures should also be reconsidered, in order to avoid the prevention of human mobility.

Overall, these recommended measures attempt to increase human security in border process and to fill the “humanitarian *vacuums*” which are present at sea and land borders, thus facilitating the relationship between border security and human protection. However, what happens at borders reflects within the country, even where human rights abuses and vulnerability experienced by immigrants are less evident and more silent. Therefore, a long-lasting de-securitization should tackle also other geographical sites, beyond the borders, and subsequent phases of the migratory journey: immigrants' integration within the local community.

## **Chapter 4 – The transformative potential of immigrants and its impact on integration**

### *4.1 – Immigrants: acting as citizens without citizenship*

#### 4.1.1 – The access to naturalization: why is it important?

Humanitarian actors operating at the border contribute to the process of de-securitization through their humanitarian and political borderwork. They influence the mainstream framing of migrants as a threat, they raise awareness on state violence, they conduct advocacy campaigns and they lobby the government, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding and management of migratory dynamics. To perform a successful de-securitization, these actions need to penetrate the political élite which should subsequently propose, adopt, and implement measures to terminate securitizing dynamics. To this end, migrants themselves constitute an agency, because of two reasons. Firstly, they hold a transformative potential which manifests through their different actions of resistance – both discursive and practical – to the current border and migration regime. Borders, the State, and migrants are mutually determined: border processes impact human mobility but, simultaneously, migrants, as agents, shape them and shape the political and legal order of the destination country (Mezzadra, 2011). Secondly, immigrants, being the “silenced others”, the securitized subjects, have the authority to speak, compared to non-governmental organizations (Aradau, 2004). Practices and claims performed by immigrants gain even more importance precisely because they experience borders’ exclusionary mechanisms and state violence. Moreover, their struggles are present throughout the entire host country, even in areas that are not borders, and throughout all the phases of the migration journey, such as the integration in the labour market or education.

Nevertheless, to perform the agents of transformation, migrants need to obtain the authorization to speak and thus to be recognized as discursive partners (*Ibid.*). Therefore, they should be included in the concept of belonging, which, traditionally, is defined by citizenship. Citizenship, in fact, “is a particular legal bond between an individual and the State, acquired by birth or naturalization [...] which confers individual rights and imposes

obligations that a State reserves for its population” (European Commission, n.d.,g). Citizenship constitutes therefore a formal contract between the individual and the State, entitling its holders to the access to formal rights (Hawthorne, 2022). Accordingly, citizenship is not only a form of power that sorts among those who are entitled and those who are not to cross specific state borders, but it also confers core rights of political participation. Citizenship constitutes therefore an “internal border”, which distinguishes between full members of the *polity* and outsiders entitled to stay on the territory on the basis of different residence permits (Ambrosini, 2016, p. 84). Although, citizenship, understood as a belonging to a community of equals, constitutes a commitment against subordination and inequality, it can at the same time function as a form of subordination: “the universalistic inward inclusion exerted by citizenship is combined by an outward exclusion”. “Immigrants enter the spatial domain of universalistic citizenship but remain outside it for significant aspects of their social experience” (*Ibid.*, p. 85). In fact, without citizenship migrants are excluded from the political life of the receiving country: their authority to speak is undermined, and social positions, resulting from securitization, are objectified.

Consequently, the right to nationality, and more precisely the right to change nationality, already provided for in article 15 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a fundamental step in the migratory journey, in order to allow the permanent settlement of the immigrant and the disarticulation of the Self-Other binomial. Considering refugees, in international refugee law, naturalization is laid down in article 34 of the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which reads as follow:

The Contracting States shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees. They shall in particular make every effort to expedite naturalization proceedings and to reduce as far as possible the charges and costs of such proceedings.

Therefore, States bear the positive obligation to remove hurdles to assimilation – in up-to-date terms integration – and to naturalization. Naturalization, the act of investing an alien with the status of a national in each state, is the final stage of the migratory process. In fact, the granting of citizenship coincides with the cessation of the refugee status, pursuant to Article 1 of the Geneva Convention, or, of other forms of protection provided for in regional and national instruments, e.g., subsidiary protection in EU

Member States, and with the acquisition of the receiving state protection. However, naturalization is also crucial for migrants who are not recognized as refugees but who plan a long-term stay in the host country. Different reasons explain the importance of naturalization for migrants. The granting of citizenship is a complete protection against refoulement, providing the new citizen with territorial security. Moreover, citizenship entitles the new citizen to political rights, such as the right to vote and to be elected, and it facilitates the enjoyment of social, economic, and cultural rights, such as: the right to adequate housing, food, social security. Moreover, naturalization, being the condition for full citizenship rights and the symbolic recognition of belonging, creates conditions for active participation of every member of the society to the social and political life.

A durable legal status will therefore impact inclusion, which is the goal of integration, and facilitate the participation of immigrants in the shaping of at least local policies that affect the life of the community in which they live (CoE, 2021). Cities with effective integration policies “give better outcomes in terms of residents’ perceptions of cohesion, trust in the administration, safety, quality of services, welfare, good governance and economic growth”. On the one hand, the co-creation of public policies is a “source of dynamism, innovation, adaptability and competitive advantage” (*Ibid.*, pp. 16,17). On the other hand, from an economic point of view, naturalization facilitates the access to the labour market. Migrants have the potential to increase workforces, they contribute to taxes and social contributions, they boost the working-age population, and they have positive effects on the GDP growth over the long term (*Ibid.*, p. 10). However, significant disparities exist among States party to the Geneva Convention concerning the granting of citizenship. Its importance is often neglected. Recent developments in the international refugee regime, precisely the 2016 New York Declaration A/RES/71/1 and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees A/RES/73/151, adopted by the United Nation General Assembly, omit to tackle local integration and naturalization. They both aim to protect the rights of beneficiaries of international protection, to support host communities and to ensure that refugees can lead productive lives. The first one contains commitments of Member States and the second one provides a blueprint for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders (Global Compact, 2018). However, both soft-law instruments fail to include local integration and the granting of citizenship in their objectives; instead, they just define them as “useful” (*Ibid.*, p. 38), dismissing the



importance of a durable solution to displacement and of human mobility's positive impact on receiving countries. Since naturalization remains a state prerogative, the level of politicization of migrants varies across countries. A high level of politicization corresponds to more favourable possibilities for bringing migration back "to the normal bargaining process of the public sphere" (Wæver, 1995, p. 57). This dynamic is not observed in Italy, where the legal situation regarding access to citizenship, and more generally the socio-political participation of foreigners, has gradually deteriorated, since the first immigration legislation.

#### 4.1.2 – Immigrants' de-politicization. The Italian citizenship regime.

In Italy, the resident population with foreign citizenship on 1 January 2024 amounts to 5,308,000, marking an increase of 166,000 individuals (+3.2%) with respect to 2023. The incidence on the total population reaches 9% (Istat, 2024). However, Italy is one of the EU Member States with the most restrictive citizenship law. Requirements to naturalization are among the most selective, and numerous hurdles exist in the practice. Moreover, Italy has signed, but never ratified, the European Convention on Nationality ETS 166 of 1997, which includes specific articles on non-nationals and the acquisition of nationality. Domestically, law 91/1992, amended by Law 132/2018, regulates the granting of citizenship by naturalization. Currently, naturalization by residence – for non-EU applicants, refugees included – is subordinated to: (1) a ten-years period of legal continuous and uninterrupted residence on the Italian territory, (2) the knowledge of the Italian language – at level no lower than B1 (CEFR) (3) evidence of sufficient income to sustain oneself and, if any, one's household, and (4) the absence of criminal convictions and social dangerousness. Moreover, naturalization applications can only be submitted electronically and are also subject to the payment of the 250 euros fee in addition to the tax stamp.

Regarding the granting of citizenship to new-borns, Italian citizenship is transmitted through *ius sanguinis*. Children, who are born in Italy, of immigrants automatically inherit their parents' nationality at birth. If no parent has Italian citizenship, they must wait until they reach the age of eighteen to apply for it. As a result, more than one million minors, corresponding to 11% of the Italian population, find themselves in a

situation of precariousness and are denied the enjoyment of formal rights attached to the status of citizen (OXFAM, 2022). For example, the absence of citizenship prevents them from participating in competitive sports or from applying for and benefiting from the possibility of a study period abroad. The eighteen-years requirement must correspond to continuous and uninterrupted legal residence in Italy: a *conditio sine qua non* for the naturalization of foreigners born in Italy. In addition to these demanding requirements, there are also procedural hurdles to the granting of citizenship, often leaving the applicant in a condition of administrative limbo (Hawthorne, 2022). For instance, after the citizenship application is filed, the procedural time for its issuance can range up to two years for applications filed after 2020. Previously, procedural times could take up to four years. Some attempts to reform the present citizenship framework, in a less restrictive way, were presented in 2015 and 2018, but both failed. In 2015, following the campaign *L'Italia sono anche io* [I am also Italy] promoted by the Rete G2<sup>45</sup>, a movement born in 2005 constituted by second generation immigrants, the Letta Government – Democratic Party – put the *ius soli* at the top of its agenda (*Ibid.*) A draft legislation was formulated in this regard, which, however, was never passed in the Senate and provoked harsh reactions among neofascist movements – *CasaPound* [PoundHouse] and *Forza Nuova* [New Force]. These groups, but also other right-wing parties, such as *Lega Nord* [Northern League] argued for a link between the *ius soli* and Islamic terrorism and ethnic substitution (*Ibid.*, p. 99). In 2018, another reform to the citizenship law was proposed, which called for the institution of the *ius scholae*: the recognition of Italian citizenship for foreign minors born in Italy or arrived before the age of twelve who have resided legally and without interruption in Italy and have regularly attended at least five years of study within the Italian education system (IISole24ore, 2022). However, the proposed legislation stalled in the Chamber in 2022, simultaneously to the establishment of the new Meloni Government.

The Italian restrictive access to citizenship has, as a result, the exclusion of a large segment of migrant population legally residing in Italy from the political and social life, thus supporting the process of securitization of migration. Immigrants are de-politicized, thereby marginalized from the decision-making process that shapes their lives through

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<sup>45</sup> For further information look, *inter alia*: Rete G2, (n.d.). “Rete G2”, *secondegenerazioni.it*, [<https://www.secondegenerazioni.it>]. Visited on the 05 Mai 2024].

the device of citizenship. This applies to migrants, but also to refugees, despite the obligation to facilitate their integration and naturalization under the 1951 Refugee Convention. “The refugee status constitutes a grey area of politics in which refugees are at best entitled to humanitarian treatment, but do not in themselves constitute political beings”. Refugees are “outsiders”, “invisible individuals of suspended social qualities” excluded from participating in the game of power (Xypolytas; Psmitis, 2024). Thereby, the paradox of the “right to have rights” which Hannah Arendt illustrates in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*<sup>46</sup>, materializes. The enjoyment of universal human rights always depends on the act of recognition by a sovereign nation-state (Hawthorne, 2018, p. 107). According to the association *Città Migrante* [Migrant City], a restrictive citizenship regime, together with the issuance of short residence permits, which must be renewed periodically – every 6/12 months –, is a form of racial exclusion<sup>47</sup>. Despite Italy’s attempt to hide it, “through actions such as awarding honorary citizenship to dead migrants – while simultaneously criminalizing the survivors – racial nationalism persists, albeit different from the one characterizing the fascist period. These new mechanisms of exclusion and disadvantage on a racial basis have pervaded the apparatus of citizenship precisely when Italy turned from a country of emigration to a country of immigration. Citizenship has also become entangled with ideas about market and economic productivity, leading to its subordination to the market logic (*Ibid.*, p. 115). Indeed, the legitimacy of being part of the national community is also governed by economic criteria. The economic requirements to naturalization, in the form of fees for the issuance of relevant documents and in the form of evidence of income, prescribed by the Italian citizenship law, determine, *inter alia*, who is eligible to become a member of Italian national *polity* and who is not.

Despite the exclusionary mechanisms inherent to citizenship, the difficulties to access naturalization, and although proposals to reform the Italian citizenship regime have stalled, citizenship remain a priority battleground for justice and social inclusion. Immigrants continue to pursue their struggles to resist this regime, developing new ways of political belonging and re-identification, to overcome the exclusion imposed by formal

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<sup>46</sup> For further information look, *inter alia*: Arendt, H., (1973). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: New York: Harcourt Brace Jovannovich.

<sup>47</sup> E-mail interview with Città Migrante, June 02, 2024.

citizenship (*Ibid.*, p. 72). These new ways of self-understanding have led to the emergence of a new concept of citizenship, decoupled from the nation-state, which expresses a transnational belonging. Therefore, citizenship does not only constitute itself as “membership and inclusion” but also as “practice” (Hobson *et al*, 2008, p. 43). Immigrants are a transnational collective agency that has the potential to challenge national institutions precisely through their struggles for recognition. Struggles that are defined as subaltern acts of citizenship, i.e., self-constitutions of subjects as citizens (*Ibid.*, p. 107). In fact, “recognition struggles are social movements that are quintessential expressions of citizenship practice; they are about collective agency and the dynamic processes that shape identities as well political opportunities and power resources of groups” (Hobson *et al*, 2008, p. 43). Therefore, these acts of citizenship reshape belonging and identity in transnational terms.

#### 4.1.3 – Being part of the political without citizenship: acts of citizenship

Despite the current de-politicization of immigrants resulting from the Italian citizenship regime, migration itself is a social movement and migrants can act as citizens, autonomously from their legal status (Mezzadra, 2011). The migrants’ agency, through its struggles, is a social subject and has a political dimension. Migrants and refugees can assume active roles in practices of access and enjoyment, and in reinterpretations and negotiations of the role of citizenship (Ambrosini, 2016, p. 92). Therefore, the recognition of the migrants’ agency requires a different conception of citizenship: independent from the nation-state, which identifies migrants’ individual and collective actions, claims and struggles as expressions of politics, that is:

The ability of a group of people to intervene, with more or less organized collective efforts, both by influencing the decision-making processes that shape their daily living conditions, and by pushing the boundaries of the political process to include new actors, thus challenging the political status quo (Xypolytas; Psmitis, 2024, p. 63).

Accordingly, citizenship is not just *status* and *habitus* – “ways of thought and conduct that are internalized over a relative long period of time”. Citizenship is a set “of practices of becoming claim-making subjects in and through various sites and scales” (Isin; Nielsen, 2008, p. 16). Subjects that are excluded from the formal citizenship

constitute themselves as citizens, as those to whom “the right to have rights” is due through acts of citizenship. These latter are acts “through which citizens, strangers, outsiders and aliens emerge not as beings already defined but as beings acting and reacting with others” (*Ibid.*, p. 39). Individuals excluded from the formal citizenship exercise their rights through citizenship practices: their movements and struggles. Therefore, acts of citizenship transform “forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors as activist citizens (claimants of rights and responsibilities) through creating new sites and scales of struggle”. Citizenship is widened by the foundation of new subjectivities and the articulation of claims. New forms, such as: “cosmopolitan citizenship”, “ecological citizenship”, “multicultural citizenship”, or “transgendered citizenship” are formed (*Ibid.*, p. 17). Therefore, acts of citizenship are a “rupture in the given”: they break with *habitus* and other “enduring dispositions that account for the persistence and stability of an order” (*Ibid.*, p. 26). They are the real moments that change constituted practices, status and order. (*Ibid.*, p. 10). Acts of citizenship and therefore migrants’ manifestations of their being political challenge the formal understanding of citizenship, thus subverting, through practice and from below, its exclusionary mechanisms. Nation-state-based conceptions of citizenship appear vacuous, as do existing categorizations among migrants – i.e., refugees/economic migrants. This activist turn in citizenship emancipates migrants, “the silenced others”, constituting a condition *sine qua non* to de-securitize.

To what extent can acts of citizenship be considered de-securitizing acts? Through the recognition of these acts, citizenship turns from the condition to be political, to a claim to belonging which manifests through the political. Firstly, acts of citizenship are a form of contestation to the present border and migration management. Through this claim to belonging, migrants destabilize the knowledge, and consequently the authority, of securitizing actors. Everyday collective actions, taking place in the public sphere performed by migrants, counter the framing and institutionalization of migration as a security threat for the nation-state, thereby challenging the “expert knowledge in the securitization of migration” (Scheel, 2022, p.1). Secondly, acts of citizenship are a form of resistance to drawbacks of the border regime and the state violence to which migrants and refugees are subjected to, thus constituting their survival strategies. In fact,

mobilizations, and practices of resistance, that range from more overt ones, as public protests, and strikes, to hidden ones, as the non-acceptance of services provided in inhumane detention centers (Xypolytas; Psmitis, 2024, p. 72), shed light on grave consequences, in terms of human rights abuses, deriving from the legitimized extraordinary measures adopted to manage the migration “issue”. Resistance practices make the insecurity and vulnerability experienced by migrants entering the public debate and discussion, thus challenging the exclusionary regime imposed by citizenship itself. Moreover, besides contestation and resistance, solidarity is the third form that acts of citizenship assume. In fact, migrants, through civic engagement, e.g., volunteering, neighbourliness, participation in services for the community or social organizations, enact a process of self-re-identification. They move away from labelling themselves as non-citizens. Entering new social categories and labelling themselves for instance as “workers”, “volunteers”, “students”, migrants create connections with the local receiving community and they increase the sense of belonging to it, thus turning the distinction between the Self-Other less evident. Solidarity connections, arising through encounters between old and new residents, normalize the status of internationally displaced people, releasing it from the formal recognition by the nation-state. Overall, subjects, even when socially marginalized and irregularized, claim and enact their political belonging through acts of citizenship. This practice relies on collaboration and lived experiences beyond borders, regardless their form, thus promoting the normalization and politicization of migration (Stierl, 2018).

## 4.2 – Resistance. Migrants’ mobilizations against the Italian migration management

### 4.2.1 – The Italian Immigrant movement: a snapshot

In Italy the birth of the immigrant movement dates to the 1990s, beginning of the 2000s. Embryonic forms of immigrant self-organization were divided into immigrant associations – cultural, religious, social, and advocacy associations – and the participation in trade unions (Pasqualetto; Perocco, 2021). Through these forms of civic engagement, immigrants, although deprived of elective political participation, can influence the political choices of the Italian receiving society and can advance and advocate their rights and interests (Ambrosini, 2016, p. 95). In fact, these legal entities, contribute, in contexts of socio-political pluralism, to decision-making processes, or they engage against unjust and discriminatory treatments (*Ibid.*). As for immigrant associations, at the beginning they were either students’ associations, such as the Union of Islamic Students in Italy, or political ones affiliated to homeland movements, like the Palestine Liberation Organization. Later, host-country oriented organizations, centred on the living conditions of foreigners in Italy, and homeland-oriented ones were founded (Caponio, 2005, p.933). Currently, according to the most available data from 2021, immigrants’ self-organizations located across the entire Italian territory are 1,150. Looking at border zones, in Sicily, for example, nine immigrant associations are officially recognized, which primarily engage in contrasting discrimination, intercultural mediation and language learning (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2021). In parallel, from the transformation of Italy into a country of immigration, the unionization of immigrants has always demonstrated robust. Trade unions were the main actors involved in the protection of immigrants’ rights and the promotion of their integration. Struggles, strikes, and mobilizations carried out by trade unions involved over the years a large portion of immigrant workers, and they achieved also concrete results, such as the large *Sanatoria* launched with the enter into force of the Bossi-Fini Law 189/2002 (Pasqualetto; Perocco, 2021, p. 218). Trade unions perform, in fact, three main functions for the benefit of immigrants: (1) the representation of their interests as workers, (2) the function of political participation, to promote the development of feelings of belonging and inclusion in the social community, and (3) the provision of services for the improvement of their living conditions, concerning, for

instance, family reunifications, or regularizations (Ambrosini, 2016, p. 96). Nonetheless, besides these more structured forms of participation in the social and political life of the receiving community, immigrants' activism strongly influences the public sphere. Immigrants' mobilizations, including collective ones by immigrants in irregular situations, contribute to penetrate the public debate. The first public event in the history of Italy reporting a consistent presence of the immigrant population was the anti-racist mass demonstration held in Rome on the 7 October 1989 in the aftermath of the Jerry Masslo affair, evoked in Chapter 2. However, immigrant's activism goes beyond immigrants' participation in general strikes and mass demonstrations. Two forms of it can be distinguished: occasional protests and organized mobilizations. Occasional protests are mainly temporary actions questioning specific aspects of the migration management. For instance, regarding the reception system, different methods of protests are identifiable. Protests occurring outside the camps assume the form of roadblocks, overnight camps, parades, occupations of squares and streets. Inside the reception structure they are mostly carried out through spoken complains or hunger strikes (Pasqualetto, Perocco, 2021). For what concerns organized mobilizations, they are "more structured protests [...] criticizing migration policies as a whole". As for their methods, they can assume different forms, such as the physical occupation of public spaces, and often they see the collaboration of NGOs rooted in the local context (Pasqualetto; Perocco, 2021). Examples of them are "the regular protests that took place against forced identification, violence and inhumane living conditions" in Lampedusa, in 2015 after the reception centre was turned into a hotspot (*Ibid.*, p. 225), that continue till today. In fact, September 2023, protests against the management of migration, and more precisely against the announced plan to build a new camp on Lampedusa, see a strong participation of the local community and of immigrant population (CorrierePalermo, 2023). Moreover, since the beginning of 2024, regular demonstrations are held in different Italian cities against existing CPRs and the possible opening of new structures. This includes protests organized by the network *Mai Più Lager - No ai CPR* on March 2<sup>nd</sup> in Bologna, March 16<sup>th</sup> in Turin, April 16<sup>th</sup> in Milan, and May 26<sup>th</sup> in Potenza. These organized mobilizations against the CPRs' regime are also supported by other daily discursive actions of resistance, such as the publication of articles, testimonies, the organization of conferences countering the mainstream governmental narrative on CPRs and devising alternatives to



the current immigration detention<sup>48</sup>. Moreover, they have also led to the formulation of a formal petition, on May 15<sup>th</sup>, by citizens of Milan, united with immigrants' struggles, to the Mayor Giuseppe Sala for action towards the closure of the CPR of Via Corelli<sup>49</sup>. These immigrants' collective actions, whether in the form of associationism, unionization or activism, are manifestation of bottom-up citizenship which assumes the form of migrants' resistance either to specific events, as the CPRs, or to the ensemble of the migration and border management. Immigrants through their struggles express their claims, even if not entitled to political rights attached to the status of citizens, thus manifesting the political and becoming political actors, despite their continuous institutional de-politicization.

#### 4.2.2 – The examples of Città Migrante and Coordinamento Migranti Bologna

Restricting the focus on the more organized forms of mobilizations, these have also led to the birth of specific associations and movements working for the recognition of immigrants as social subjects and as active interpreters of politics. Two notable examples among them are the association *Città Migrante* [Migrant City], born in 2007, based in Reggio Emilia, and consisting of “native” citizens and foreigners, regardless of their citizenship, and the *Coordinamento Migranti Bologna* [Migrant Coordination Bologna], born in 2004, in Bologna, whose members are also migrants and Italians. For what concerns *Città Migrante*, the association was born as a result of a union struggle for workers' rights, initiated by the workers themselves: migrant people originating from North Africa employed in the construction industry, often precarious and exploited by employers, who used to hire them, making them work<sup>50</sup>. It appears already clear that, despite the existence of different forms of immigrant self-organizations in Italy, no clear

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<sup>48</sup> For more information look, *inter alia*: “CPR, Hotspots, CARA”, *Meltingpot.org*. [<https://www.meltingpot.org/tag/cpr-hotspot-cpa/>]. Visited on the 23 Mai 2024].

<sup>49</sup> ActionAid, Altreconomia, Antigone Lombardia, ASGI, Cild, Le Carbet, Mai più lager - No ai Cpr, MeltingPot, Naga, Spazi Circolari and the other signatories of the appeal called on Mayor Giuseppe Sala to close the CPR and pay compensation for the damage caused by it to the city's image. In fact, a constant violation of inviolable rights, such as the right to defence, to healthcare, to a decent life, and to freedom of communication, takes place in the CPR. Moreover, these acts of institutional violence have led to uprisings and individual forms of protest, such as - above all - self-harm and suicide attempts (ASGI, 2024). For further information, look, *inter alia*: ASGI, (2024). “Al via un'azione popolare e una raccolta firme per far chiudere il CPR a Milano [People's action and signature collection to close the CPR in Milan]”, *asgi.it*. [<https://www.asgi.it/allontamento-espulsione/milano-immigrazione-detenzione-cpr-sindaco/>]. Visited on the 05 June 2024].

<sup>50</sup> E-mail interview with Città Migrante, June 02, 2024.

separation exists between migrant people's rights, the procedures concerning their regularization, workers' rights, and other human rights, such as the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing, and housing. These claims are not bound to any particular citizenship. Based on this idea, the aim of the association is to regain the culture of critique and participatory social conflict, in which justice belongs to all and its acquisition is also equally shared, as explained by representatives from the association.

*Città Migrante* has always posed itself as a space and sounding board for the demands of migrant people, without substituting itself for those who experience discrimination on their skin but giving them a direct say and supporting them to amplify their voices through the network of relationships developed over the years at the city and national level. [...] *Città Migrante* fights against a society that fabricates criminals on the basis of passports and forces thousands of people into invisibility and poverty. It fights against the myth of insecurity and all the instruments of propaganda and repression related to it: armies, Identification and Expulsion Centres, unnecessary restrictions on housing conditions, deportation proceedings, absurd regulation of migratory flows<sup>51</sup>.

Among the claims supported by the association, at the city level, there is that concerning the right to housing: a need felt by all citizens, but especially by migrants to whom the access to regular rents is often denied because of their race or origin. More concretely, *Città Migrante*, in cooperation with other associations, such as the Association of Malian Citizens Abroad, seek to obtain concrete commitments from the municipality and the agencies in charge of supporting the access to housing for all<sup>52</sup>. For instance, various public assemblies are organized to discuss major issues related to the enjoyment of the right to an adequate housing.

For what concerns *Coordinamento Migranti Bologna*, the movement also shows the interconnection between different human rights and advocate for the protagonism of migrants as a political priority against labour and existential precarity. *Coordinamento Migranti Bologna* affirms the recognition of the political role of migrants in their struggles against the labour precarization policies “to which they have always been

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<sup>51</sup> E-mail interview with Città Migrante, June 02, 2024.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*

exposed and by which they have always been affected in both, the labour and the social sphere” (Coordinamento Migranti Bologna, n.d.). This political union publishes articles, participates to various acts of protests, such as the demonstrations against the CPRs, shares material for further reflection to combat against daily and institutional racism. All the material published on the website of *Coordinamento Migranti Bologna* constitutes de-securitizing speech acts, because it makes visible and public the views of immigrants, their struggles and the results of their assemblies and deliberations, thus providing a counter-narrative to mainstream top-down ones. For instance, articles tackle the deficiencies of the Italian reception system and the relative difficulties faced by immigrants in obtaining residence permits, such as the long procedural times, the phenomenon of immigrants being working poors, gender issues and other subjects linked to immigrants’ everyday living. Moreover, *Coordinamento Migranti Bologna* “establishes transnational connections with the struggles of migrants from other European and non-European countries [...], claiming full freedom of movement for every man and woman who decides to build another future” (*Ibid.*).

Accordingly, it appears clear that these forms of mobilizations represent a survival strategy for individuals with a migratory background living in Italy. In fact, the access to rights attached to citizenship and to regular residence permits is increasingly restricted, and social rights are rarely guaranteed, especially for non-citizens. The institutional mechanisms responsible for defending these rights, such as the police, and judicial bodies, are also often inadequate. Migrants’ forms of resistance contest this reality and serve immigrants to emerge invisibility and enter in the *polity*. In fact, in addition to bureaucratic difficulties and to the access to rights, these bottom-up forms of resistance performed by the migrants’ agency seek to address the human and relational problems experienced by non-citizens, such as the difficulty in being perceived as individualities beyond their geographical origin or their migrant status or the levelling of the reception system to the material dimensions of existence without any recognition of immaterial needs<sup>53</sup>. However, it should also be underlined that migrants' acts of citizenship, and therefore forms of political participation, besides strategies aimed at their survival, have a positive influence on the local community. On the one hand, they often contest precisely

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<sup>53</sup> E-mail interview with Città Migrante, June 02, 2024.

measures implemented by governments that, by restricting the access to naturalization and making the reception system more and more void, increase social tensions. In fact, a citizenship constituted of various social practices, contributes to overcome “the rigid formal vision that dichotomizes society between citizens in the full senses and non-citizens or, even, ‘non-persons’”(Ambrosini, 2016, p. 98). On the other hand, the building of a claim that aims to be political implies the mobilization of many energies and it compels the establishment of relations among different subjects. For example, periodical assemblies, the organization of and participation to demonstrations where struggles, spaces and slogans are shared among citizens and non-citizens deep mutual knowledge between those belonging to the Self and those belonging to the Other. These practices also stimulate understanding of each other’s experiences and emotional rapprochement between people with different backgrounds. Consequently, greater cohesion within the community is achieved (*Ibid.*).

### *4.3 – Towards a better integration of immigrants*

#### 4.3.1 – The top-down recognition of the migrants’ agency

Pro-active and constructive resistance performed by non-citizens “problematize the EU, by unmasking the ways in which its borders are enacted materially, but also the discourses, rationales, and truths” at the basis of its exclusionary practices based on unbelonging. (Stierl, 2018, p. 7). Accordingly, resistance is “analytics of power”: shedding light on power-relations, and on “the mechanics of the EU border regime and its extensive *repertoire* of violence”. At the same time, resistance is also a “catalyst”: a transformative capacity, materialized in social interactions, “that sets socio-political forces into frictional motion and questions the local community in whose name unbelonging, and exclusion are performed”. Resistance as “catalyst” analyses power relations through the antagonism of strategies. Therefore, resistance is a bottom-up practice, which does not precede power. It is co-extensive with it. (Foucault, 1982, p. 780). Migrants’ collective actions of resistance are antagonist strategies that oppose specific aspects of power and state of domination, contributing to the migrants’ agency empowerment. They are enactments of citizenship. They are a form of expression “that

corresponds to the formation of suitable collective identities” (Xypolytas; Psimitis, 2024, p. 74).

Collective identity is a construction with strong communicative and interactive characteristics which, by activating forceful relationships between participants, gives meaning to itself through cognitive tools and emotional investment. [...] Actors involved in the construction of a collective identity tend to define in a common way their orientations of action”. However, this process “presupposes an overcoming of fixe perceptions and a break with the rules that regulate the relevant behaviours (*Ibid.*, p. 75).

The outcome of migrants’ resistance pursuing the construction of a collective identity that transcends the status that the system assigns to them is migrants’ emancipation, and this empowerment process is a “catalyst”. It entails dynamics of social transformations (*Ibid.*, p. 77). More precisely, struggles attack the form of power “which categorizes the individual [...], attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize, and which others have to recognize in him” (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). Therefore, resistance questions the status of the individual, “opposes the effects of power which are with knowledge, competence and qualification” (*Ibid.*) and challenges the understanding of human mobility and thus of the identity of foreigners residing in the welcoming country – Italy –, but outside the formal regime of citizenship. The Self-Other binomial at the basis of the dominant frames and self-conceptions regarding migration as a security threat is destabilized. “Other imaginaries of politics, solidarity and community come to the fore” and animate the contemporary European, and national, border and migration governance (Stierl, 2018, p. 3).

Migrants’ resistance, together with the humanitarian and political work performed by NGOs and actors of the solidarity sectors – as outlined in the previous chapter –, given the deriving social transformation are not silent phenomena. On the one hand, migrants’ struggles are often considered by the securitizing actors – the political élite – as a source of destabilization, as a threat to public order, thus legitimizing additional top-down securitizing discourses and practices. In fact, they have been exploited by right-wing media to reinforce the stigmatization of foreigners as part of the unbelonging. For instance, *Il Giornale* has repeatedly cited migrants’ protests against the inhuman conditions of the Lampedusa hotspot, such as the August 2023 protest against the

uneatable food and absence of foreseen by law pocketed money, as evidence of their ingratitude for Italy's reception efforts (Il Giornale, 2023c). As a result, anti-immigrant sentiments are exacerbated, as the assumption that immigrants are unwilling to integrate into the receiving society and could potentially instigate social insecurity spreads. In addition to the discursive instrumentalization of migrants' resistance, the potential threat posed by these collective actions to public order also serves to legitimize additional restrictions on their rights, which assume the form of derogations from non-absolute rights, thereby reinforcing the migration-security nexus through non-discursive practices. This is the case of the restriction on freedom of association implemented by the Meloni Government, as provided for by Article 1 of the Decree-Law No. 1/2023 with regard to humanitarian and to human rights work. On the other hand, the increasing presence of population of different origins, cultures, and religions and the deriving social transformation, stemming also from the acts of citizenship of non-citizens, has drawn the interest of non-grassroot organizations active for upholding human rights, democracy, and rule of law, specifically for what concerns integration. Among the different international juridical persons involved, the Council of Europe, precisely through its work on interculturality, pursued a recognition of the migrants' agency. In fact, its intercultural approach to integration, is precisely grounded on a conception of diversity as an asset, on the fact that interculturalism is a driver of inclusion, equality, and prosperity for all: it maximizes "the potential of diverse societies, while minimizing the risks related to human mobility and cultural diversity" (CoE, 2023). Therefore, integration policies "should move forward from labelling, categorizing citizens, and rather focus on individual assets and empowerment which can contribute to the well-being of the whole society" (CoE, 2021, p. 8). Accordingly, participation of immigrants to the socio-political life of the host country, regardless the form of grass-root initiatives, is acknowledged to positively impact the society in which they reside. Therefore, this top-down recognition of the migrants' agency is compelling evidence countering the securitizing discourses and practices of the governmental élite. By recognizing the value of diversity, the credibility of securitizing actors' claims is challenged, depriving them of legitimacy and thereby pursuing the process of de-securitization.

### 4.3.2 – The CoE intercultural approach to integration

Interculturalism is “a social, cultural, and communication phenomenon that favours understanding and dialogue and strengthens horizontal relationships between people with different cultural references” (CoE, 2023). The local level, the city, is the level of analysis where the practice of interculturalism can be better observed, since it is the level where relationships between communities are (re)negotiated reciprocally (Aradau, 2003, p.20). At the same time, also political projects to unmake security, influencing the establishment of alternative social relations that counter the exclusion of migrants, are situational and therefore confined to specific local contexts (Aradau, 2004, p. 402). The birth of the intercultural approach to integration developed by the CoE dates to a 2004 research programme of the British think tank Comedia entitled “The Intercultural City, Making the Most of Diversity” (Wood, 2009). This research led to the draft of the 2008 White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue “Living Together as Equals in Dignity” and to the launch of the Intercultural City Programme, in partnership with the European Commission, to “ensure the practice of equal rights for all, combat discrimination and racism, and actively promote constructive interaction between individuals and groups of different backgrounds, cultures and generations” (*Ibid.*, 2009, p. 13). “The programme support cities in reviewing and adapting their policies through intercultural lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to manage diversity as an advantage for the whole society” (*Ibid.*).

Moreover, it led to the adoption of the 2015 Recommendation on Intercultural Integration of the Committee of Ministers of the CoE, CM/REC(2015), outlining the principle of intercultural integration as a policy concept. Its pillars are the following: (1) ensuring equality and non-discrimination, a *conditio sine qua non* for the effective enforcement of human rights, (2) valuing diversity, (3) fostering meaningful interaction to build connections between people of different backgrounds and identities and increase interpersonal trust, solidarity and cohesion, and (4) active citizenship and participation, since an inclusive society depends on the sense of individual citizenship and belonging to a whole community (CoE, 2021). This fourth pillar of intercultural integration acknowledges the importance of immigrants’ acts of citizenship and their positive influence on integration and thus on society since, moving forward from categorizing

citizens, “individual assets and empowerment contribute to the well-being of the whole society” (CoE, 2021, p. 8). However, to understand whether this approach to integration can be valuable for the de-securitization of migration, it is necessary to consider evaluations of its outcomes in the cities where it has been implemented. Among the evaluations of the Intercultural City Programme, the one conducted by the Migration Policy Group of 2018 examines whether the intercultural integration approach advocated by the CoE leads to a better quality of life in diverse cities.

As a result, resident’s local well-being increases in cities implementing intercultural policies and intercultural cities perceive the foreigners’ presence as good (Joki; Wolffhardt, 2018, p. 3) (see annex VI). “For example, a city scoring 100% on the core ICC<sup>54</sup> index could expect that around 80% of its residents will agree that immigrants’ presence is good for the city” (*Ibid.*, p. 4). Furthermore, the comparison between the ICC index and the MIPEX index, which measures integration policies at the country level<sup>55</sup>, revealed that local intercultural policies are influenced by national integration policies. Despite this correlation depends on the division of competences on integration between the national and local level, a moderate positive correlation link is found between national integration policies and local intercultural policies: the higher the MIPEX index, the more developed local intercultural policies are (*Ibid.*, p. 6). To foster national integration strategies through interculturalism, in 2021 the CoE Working Group on Intercultural Integration (GT-ADI-INT) developed a Model Framework of an Intercultural Integration Strategy at the National Level, in order to “guide national policy practitioners in their efforts to design integration policies which help build inclusive and cohesive societies” (CoE, 2021, p. 5). In fact, when dealing with immigration, all levels of governance are concerned, and it is therefore crucial to adopt a multilevel governance approach to migrants’ integration. Besides horizontal cooperation among, for instance, local governments, vertical cooperation based on joint commitment and mutual recognition, on the division of responsibilities, on the sharing of resources and information, is necessary to address human mobility. At the same time, migrants’ acts of citizenship at a local level

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<sup>54</sup> The ICC Index (Inter-Cultural Cities Index) measures cities’ performance in relation to the intercultural integration model.

<sup>55</sup> The MIPEX (Migrant Integration Policy Index) evaluates integration policies in eight key areas for integration that are: labour market mobility, family reunification, political participation, education, health, long-term residence, access to nationality and anti-discrimination.



“are also part of a common struggle aiming to re-define national and supra-national political communities along more democratic and inclusive lines” (Aradau, 2004, p. 407), to counter the non-democratic politics of securitization, as demonstrated, for instance, by the involvement of the movement *Coordinamento Migranti Bologna* in a broader network of transnational resistance.

For what concerns Italy, the country does not have a self-standing integration law and does not conduct evaluation of integration policies. Integration largely falls under the jurisdiction of regional governments which enjoy full autonomy in policy planning and implementation (European Commission, n.d.,h). Italy scored 58 out of 100 in the latest MIPEX – 2019, with major obstacles recorded in political participation: migrants are not entitled to the right to vote or political engagement, and there is no effective consultation process. Moreover, regarding immigrants’ civic engagement and social integration, the membership of foreign-born population residing in Italy in voluntary organizations out of the total foreign-born population aged fifteen-years-old and above is lower than 30%, compared to the OECD (32) total average at 60%, showing a significant decrease since 2008/2009 (OECD, 2023, p. 137). Moreover, Italy also ranks among the OECD countries with the highest share of immigrants considering themselves members of a group that is discriminated against on the grounds of ethnicity, nationality, or race (*Ibid.*, p. 139). Concerning social obstacles to successful integration perceived by Italian citizens aged fifteen-years-old and above, immigrants’ limited efforts to integrate is perceived as the main hurdle, as illustrated by the column depicting Italy in the following graph. In fact, 75% of respondents expresses this view, with respect to an EU 27 average ranging from 60% to 70%. Subsequently, according to the respondents, discrimination against immigrants, limited interactions between immigrants and host-country nationals and negative portrayal of immigrants in the media are other reasons that hinder successful integration. Furthermore, it appears interesting to compare the factors that hinder successful integration with those perceived as most crucial for achieving it. Figure 3 shows that Italian citizens aged fifteen and above consider knowledge of the Italian language as the most important factor for successful integration in Italy, followed by the acceptance of the value and norms of the host-country society. Overall, these factors appear, as far as Italy is concerned, decisive. In other EU member states (those located

closer to the origin of the Cartesian plane), these variables only partly explain the success or not of integration.

Figure II: Social obstacles to successful integration of non-EU migrants in the EU

EU citizens, 15-year-olds and above who think that the respective factor is an obstacle to successful integration of immigrants in the country, 2021

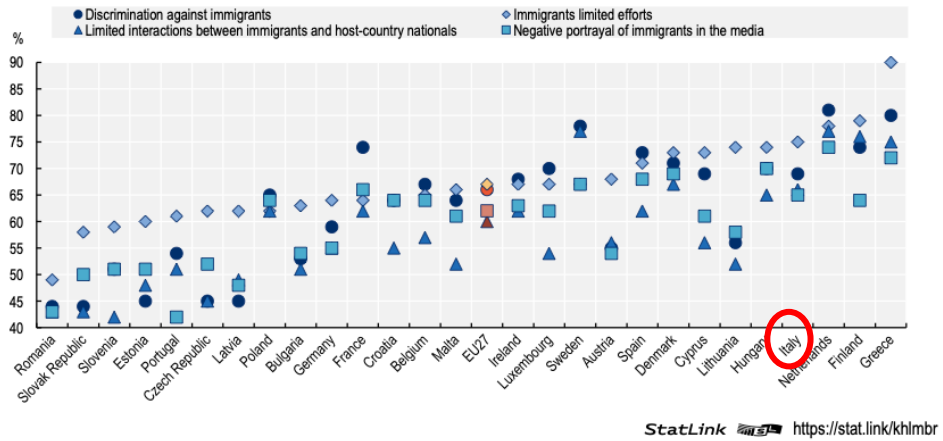
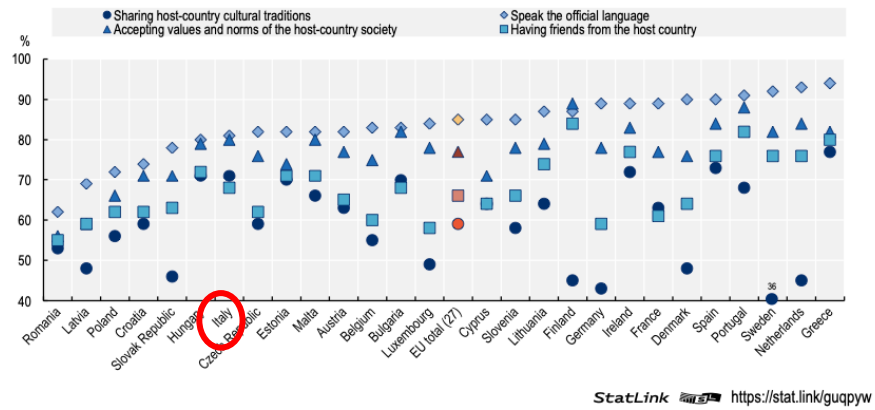


Figure III: Social factors for successful integration of non-EU migrants in the EU

EU citizens, 15-year-olds and above who think that the respective factor is important for successful integration of immigrants in the country, 2021



Source: OECD, (2023).

Consequently, integration at the national level in Italy appears limited. However, twenty-eight cities are part of the Italian Network of Intercultural Cities named “*Città del Dialogo* [Cities of Dialogue]”, which was established in 2010, but according to the ICC

Index, the average score among the Italian intercultural cities remains moderate: 54,6 out of 100 (Intercultural Cities Index Charts, n.d.).

#### 4.3.3 – Policy recommendations: fostering the participation of migrants to the socio-political life of the host community

To improve social cohesion in Italian host-communities, different measures can be undertaken by Italy. At both national and local level immigrants' integration can be promoted, precisely in the realm of socio-political participation. In fact, enhancing the political participation of immigrants, alongside reinforcing interculturalism and thus increasing the whole community well-being, constitutes a veritable de-securitizing strategy. It acts on the Self-Other binomial, thus shifting migration out of the “threat-defence” sequence and into the ordinary public sphere (Buzan *et al*, 1998, p. 29). At the same time, objective 16 of the 2018 Global Compact on Migration recognizes the potential of migrants' empowerment to realize full inclusion and social cohesion. Migrants' active participation to the life of the receiving society contributes to its prosperity (Global Compact, 2018, p. 23). Improvements of the current Italian framework should focus on two areas: (1) informal forms of political participation – the recognition of the migrants' agency itself, and thus of the value of cultural diversity –, and (2) on formal forms of political participation – access to naturalization and electoral rights.

For what concerns informal political participation, immigrants' mobilizations – self-organization through participation in civil societies organizations, unionization, activism in the form of protests or other grassroot initiatives – should be recognized and enabled.

- (1) The Italian State needs to comply with its negative obligation to respect the right to protest and strike, together with the right to freedom of expression and association. The criminalization of solidarity NGOs, such as rescue NGOs should stop.
- (2) Italy should comply with its positive obligation to protect and fulfil these rights through financial, administrative, legislative, and judicial measures. Efforts should be directed towards supporting immigrant associationism and unionization through funding, capacity-building, the involvement of NGOs in

decision-making processes and the enhancement of mechanisms for monitoring integration policies. Regarding monitoring mechanisms, the 4-A<sup>56</sup> scheme – based on availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability – is envisaged to elaborate an index for the evaluation of integration policies.

- (3) The interaction between local authorities and non-citizens should be improved. Therefore, there should be further promotion of consultation mechanisms and consultative bodies. After the entry into force of the Martelli Law and the Bossi-Fini Law, two consultative instruments have been introduced in Italy at the local level: the *Consulta per gli stranieri* [Council for Foreigners], which promotes initiatives and activities aimed at including non-EU and stateless citizens in the city, and the *Consigliere Comunale Straniero Aggiunto* [Foreign Deputy Municipal Councilor], who participates in meetings of the Municipal Council with the right to present initiatives, questions, motions and interpellations, thus representing those who are not entitled to vote in local elections. Foreigners' representative bodies should be strengthened and harmonized throughout Italy.
- (4) The representation of non-citizens in other boards of bodies, which differ from the decision-making ones, such as schools or trade-unions, should be increased. This would enhance exchanges between the local community and the foreigner population, thus fostering local cohesion.
- (5) Attention should also focus on newcomers, especially when vulnerable individuals. Mechanisms for their inclusion in the public debate should be set up, enabling them to fully integrate into society. For this purpose, the role of social media and online communities should be explored.

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<sup>56</sup> The 4-A scheme is a framework developed by politician Katarina Tomasevski, the first UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education. It is based on four indicators: availability, accessibility, adaptability, and accessibility and it measures state's compliance to their positive and negative obligations arising from socio-economical rights. This framework is closely related to the "respect/protect and fulfil" one. For further information look: Tomasevski, K., (2006). *Human rights obligations in education: the 4-A scheme*: Wolf Legal Pubns. Available at UNESCO digital library.

Regarding formal political participation, the recommended actions revolve around the access to citizenship and the extension of active and passive voting rights to non-citizens at least at the local level, provided certain requirements are met.

- (6) Italy should ratify the CoE Convention on Nationality CETS 166.
- (7) Requirements to naturalization should be simplified, particularly for second generations. Legislative proposals on the introduction of the *ius scholae* are welcomed and specific requests expressed by migrants' self-organizations, such as Rete G2, should be taken into account by policymakers.
- (8) Italy should comply with the positive obligation "to facilitate the naturalization of refugees" derived from article 34 of the Geneva Convention on the status of refugees. To this end, several actions are recommended. The establishment of language classes should be promoted, and their quality should be guaranteed, as the knowledge of the Italian language is a *sine qua non* condition for citizenship. Discretion in the evaluation of income requirements should be abolished and procedural hurdles should be removed. A legislative proposal aimed at reducing procedural time – currently up to two years – for the issuance of citizenship is welcomed.
- (9) The promotion of initiatives aimed at the political empowerment of naturalized citizens is encouraged. For instance, their engagement in national political parties together with their exercise of their right to vote should be addressed, given that the right to vote and to stand for elections is a pillar of democratic citizenship. For this very reason, the strengthening of formal political participation by extending electoral rights to non-citizens is also suggested. Currently, article 48 of the Italian Constitution provides for the right to active and passive voting just for Italian citizens. Moreover, the *Circolare Ministeriale* [Ministry *Circulaire*]<sup>57</sup> 4/2004 clarifies the interdiction of the right to vote and to stand for elections of non-EU citizens with a regular residence permit, as the exercise of administrative voting is also dependent on citizenship.

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<sup>57</sup> A *Circolare Ministeriale* is an internal act to uniformly direct the action of administrative bodies, without external effects. It provides for the correct interpretation of laws and regulations to ensure a harmonized application of the law. This act is not a source of law of the Italian Republic.

- (10) A revision of the legislation is recommended to ensure that non-citizens who have resided in the municipality for a minimum of – suggested – two years can vote in local elections, and local and national consultative *referenda*. Before determining the content of the legislative proposal, it must be established whether this revision can be enacted by ordinary law or whether there is a need for a constitutional amendment.

These recommended actions fit within the four pillars of the CoE intercultural approach to integration. By ensuring equality, valuing diversity, fostering meaningful interaction, active citizenship, and participation, a refusal of the definition of “the political community as ultimately a question of distancing from or eliminating the enemy” is advanced (Huysmans, 1998a, p. 588). Moreover, the promotion and facilitation of the performance of immigrants’ acts of citizenship operate precisely on the collective acceptance of issues, thus promoting the non-acceptance of migration framed and institutionalized as a security threat. In fact, interculturalism creates the opportunity to “incorporate the question of migration in the quest for an alternative foundation of the political community, thus absorbing security questions which arise in relation to migration in a politically significant de-securitizing representation” (*Ibid*, p. 588).

## CONCLUSIONS

As illustrated in the previous chapters, migration, in Italy, but more generally in the European Union, undergone a process of securitization, which has become more noticeable since the establishment of the Meloni Government in 2022. Through speech acts performed by the political élite and conveyed by the media, which are grounded in and propagate a securitizing, criminalizing and emergency narrative, and through practices revolving around border security, administrative detention, and externalization, migration is no more a political issue, but a security one. However, such a migration and border management appear neither efficient nor effective, considering the level of human insecurity experienced by migrants *en route* to Italy and by long-term international migrants legally residing in the country. In this research I have tried, blending insights from critical migration, security, and citizenship studies, to investigate the existing counter-movements to the securitization of migration. These assume the form of humanitarian and political borderwork performed by non-governmental organizations and national associations, as well as acts of citizenship performed by non-citizens at the local level. As a result, border processes that neglect human-security and the refusal to consider migrants an agency, in sociological terms, are the primary areas where action should be taken to reintegrate migration in the political arena. The suggested policy recommendations – advanced at the end of chapters 3 and 4 – are a blueprint for performing de-securitization. Many further efforts and initiatives are required for de-securitization to be successful. Decisive in this regard will be the work in the area of asylum, migration, and external border management of the new European Parliament, following the June 2024 elections.

Although the present thesis lays the foundation for achieving a human mobility in security and enhancing intercultural integration of immigrants in Italy for the benefit of migrants and local communities, two strands of development for the present research can be outlined: de-securitization through the replacement of border security with a human mobility in security, and, within local host communities, de-securitization through acts of citizenship performed by non-citizens. Moreover, from a methodological point of view, while this thesis has already emphasized the need to reject methodological nationalism by introducing and partially adopting the Autonomy of Migration approach, the full

potential of this approach can only be realized through the development of ethnographic research. Therefore, ethnographic fieldwork with migrants and actors of the solidarity sector is required to collect subjectivities of human mobility and transform them into actionable insights to de-securitize migration. However, specific ethical considerations will be necessary, given the engagement with vulnerable individuals and the challenge of power-dynamics. The weaknesses of qualitative research in terms, for instance, of the generalization of findings, should also be addressed for the purpose of further research.

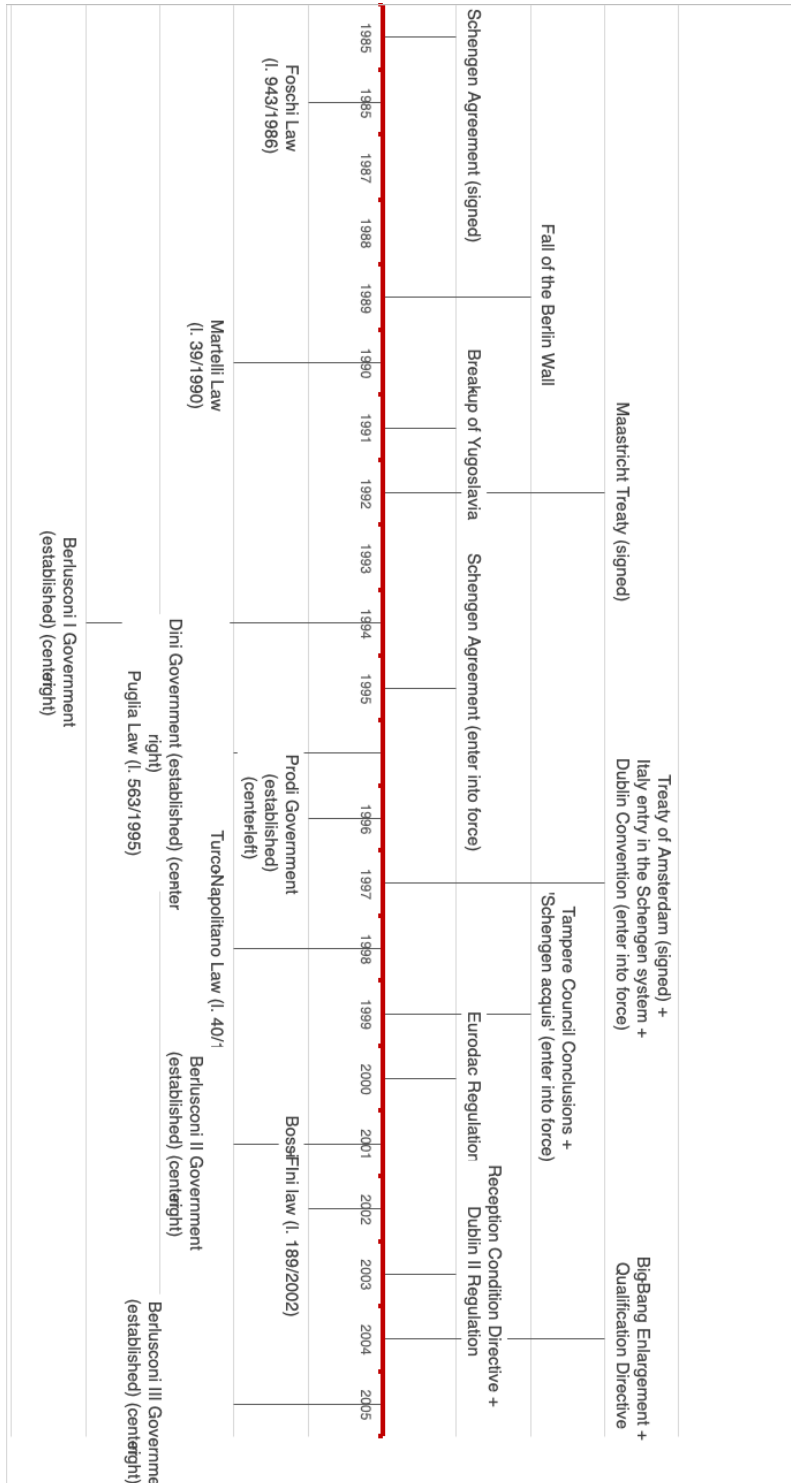
To conclude, given my passion for this research topic and my involvement in local activism for migrants' rights, I am determined and hope to continue this work, focusing on one of the two strands, as part of a Ph. D. programme.

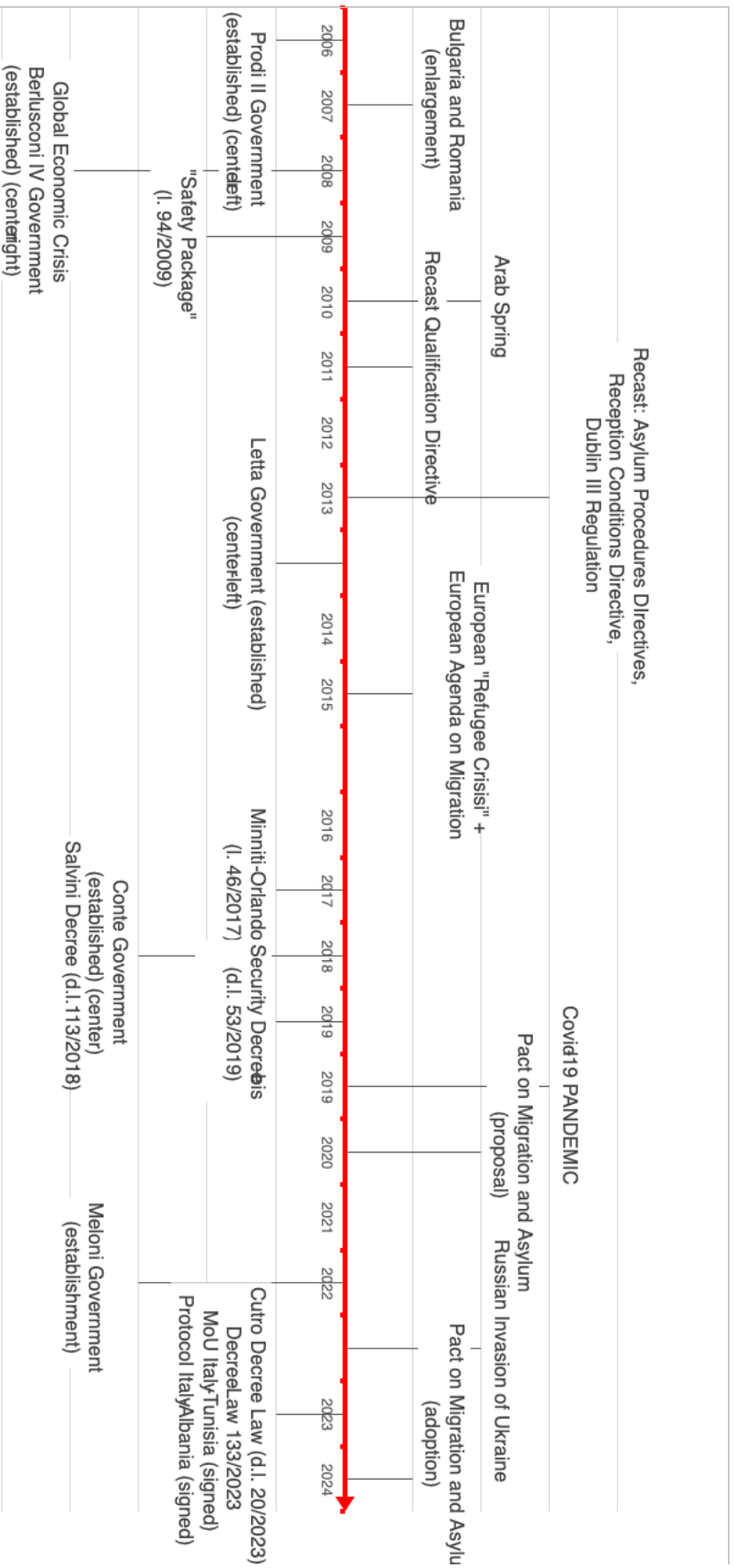


## LISTS OF ANNEXES

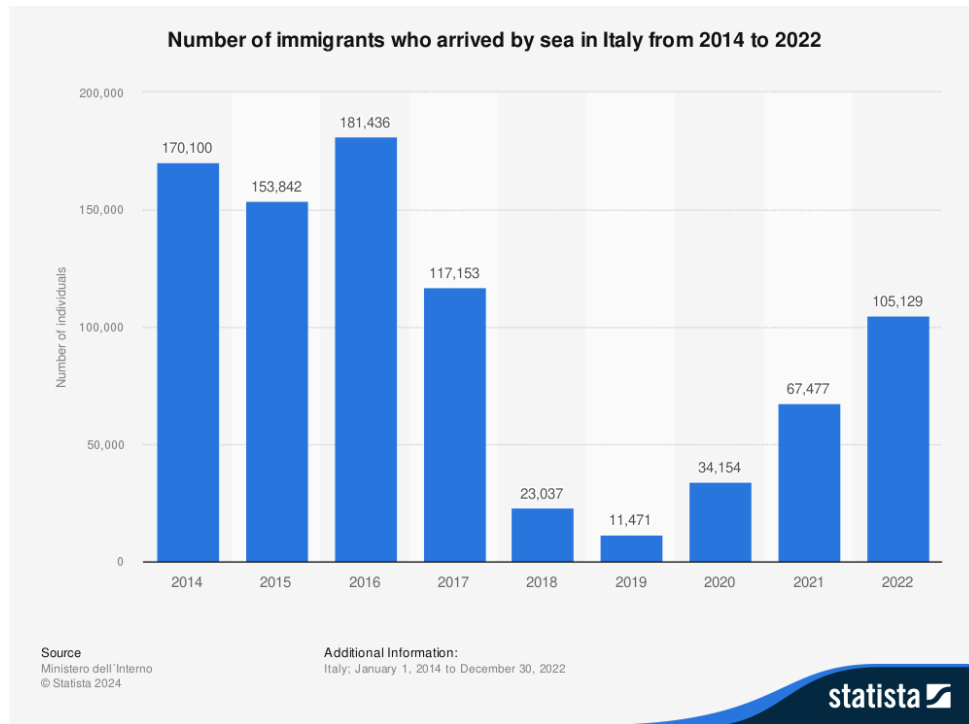
1. Timeline comparing Italian legislative acts/provisions (1986-2024) (bottom) to the evolution of the CEAS (top).
2. Number of immigrants who arrived by sea from 2014 to 2022.
3. Number of disembarked migrants from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2023 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2023, compared with data of the same period in the years 2021 and 2022.
4. Newspapers' front-pages: *La Stampa*, *La Repubblica*, *Il Fatto quotidiano*. (27 February 2023).
5. *Porta d'Europa*, Lampedusa.
6. Correlation between the Intercultural Cities Index (ICC) and residents' attitudes towards foreigners.
7. Mediterranean Sea Route (map)

**ANNEX I:** Timeline comparing Italian legislative acts/provisions (1986-2024) (bottom) to the evolution of the CEAS (top).



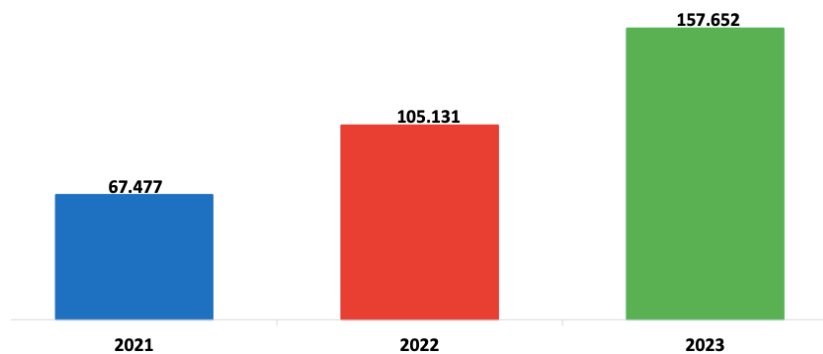


**ANNEX II:** Number of immigrants who arrived by sea from 2014 to 2022.



Source: Statista, (2024)

**ANNEX III:** Number of disembarked migrants from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2023 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2023, compared with data of the same period in the years 2021 and 2022.



Source: Minister of Labour and Social Policies, (2024)

ANNEX IV: Newspapers' front-pages: *La Stampa*, *La Repubblica*, *Il Fatto quotidiano*.  
(27 February 2023).



Source: *La Repubblica*, (2023)



Source: *La Stampa*, (2023)



Source: *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, (2023)

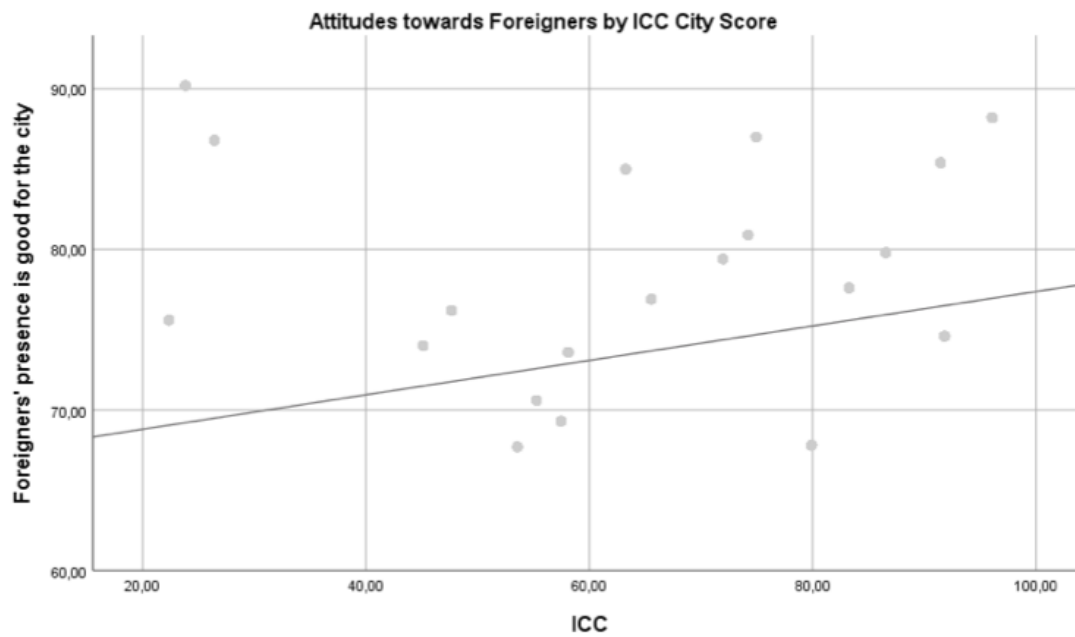
ANNEX V: *Porta d'Europa*, Lampedusa.



Source: Wikimedia, (2020)

**ANNEX VI:** Correlation between the Intercultural Cities Index (ICC) and residents' attitudes towards foreigners.

**Chart 2: Correlation of core ICC Index & Attitudes to Foreigners**

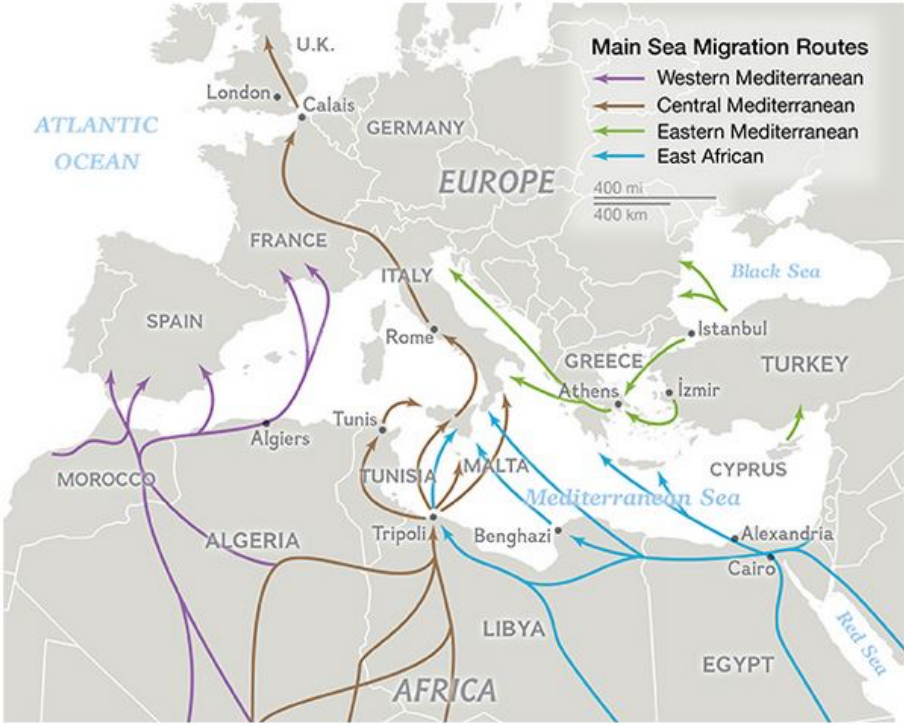


Source: Migration Policy Group, (2018)



ANNEX VII: Mediterranean Sea Route (map)

Mediterranean Sea Route



Source: IOM, (n.d.).



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