

Introduction¹

The 2010 *Annual Report on Immigration and Asylum* (Commission of the European Communities 2011) has counted the number of irregularly staying third country nationals apprehended in the European Union in 2009 at 570,000, while 394,000 persons were refused entry in 2010 (European Migration Network 2011). As for asylum, 257,815 applications were recorded in Member States in 2010, a decreasing number with respect to previous years (UNHCR 2011). In 2012 irregulars apprehended were around 430,000² coming prevalently from Morocco, Pakistan and India. Germany, Greece, Spain and France were main destinations of these irregular flows³. People irregularly apprehended in Italy in 2012 totaled around 29,400, mainly coming from Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria. In 2012, some 332,000 persons in need of protection reached the European Union, especially Germany, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Belgium (Ministero dell' Interno 2013a), with Syria ranking second only to Afghanistan as country of citizenship. In the first months of 2013 overall irregular immigration was below the levels of previous months; this fact, was partly due to seasonal dynamics that render crossings and general migration journeys more difficult to pursue together with huge border control operations at the Greek-Bulgarian-Turkey borders (FRONTEX 2013). And yet, events that occurred in the last months of 2013 suggest these positive estimates will be soon re-considered.

How do these figures translate and what do they mean in 'political' terms? The relevance of migration as an issue and its 'routes' are progressively assuming in the European Union's (EU) agenda and in that of Member States has

¹ Officers at the European Commission and at the Italian Ministry for the Interior have provided a lot of information contained in this work, although they preferred not to be explicitly cited. The author wishes to thank Gino Barsella (Italian Council for Refugees- CIR) for information regarding Libya's detention facilities. Indeed, what written is the author's only responsibility. The author is also responsible for the translations of non-English quotations.

² Data do not include apprehended persons in Hungary and the Netherland.

³ The author uses the term «irregular» with reference to not authorized flows. «Illegal» migration is only employed when explicitly used by policymakers or other sources.

been recently highlighted by the events occurring in North Africa and the Middle East. Reports by the FRONTEX Risk Analysis Network (FRAN) showed that the bulk of irregular immigration towards the EU's external border shifted from the eastern (main transit route in the last years) to the central Mediterranean in 2011, with an increase in detection of illegal border crossing starting from the first period of 2011 with respect to previous quarters (FRONTEX 2011b). In 2012, instead, the eastern Mediterranean regained a new relevance for border crossing, due to a sharp increase of Syrians and immigrants from Mali; as a matter of fact, agreements between Italy and the Tunisian government on the return of nationals has starkly contributed to the downscale of the entity of inflows throughout the central Mediterranean route (FRONTEX 2013). The overall European response to the uprisings in the region, though, has been quite fragmented, ambiguous and uncoordinated. On the one hand, the EU was called to demonstrate its global role, showing its resolve and playing as a 'model' supporting democratic transitions. On the other hand, with a view to the huge flows of migrants trying to make their way to Europe, notably through Libya, the EU was called to entice coordination and solidarity in accordance to the commitment to a common migration and asylum framework and adherence to its own principles in the management of the matter. Alas, the European Union and its Member States have fallen short of expectations, a fact highlighted by the tragic death of hundreds people off the coast of Lampedusa in late September and in October 2013⁴. The lukewarm resolution and the patchy answer to the crises in its immediate neighborhood are to be explained prevalently by a marked tendency to attach a security connotation to massive and irregular flows heading for Europe which, as it is explained in this work, has been framed through time.

Indeed, migration is a multifaceted topic, encompassing economic, social and demographic aspects. While it generally defines the ever-existing movement of people, it may be 'good' or 'bad', depending on the specific image and interpretation provided to the phenomenon. What seems to have gained ground in the last years is a general unease with the matter, the increasing perception of a threat on the border of the European Union, set to challenge its security. The general discomfort over the matter is well reported in official discourses and documents, which depict irregular flows as a potential challenge to the society and to the integrity of the European Union. A cross-border phenomenon, irregular migration has been associated with other potential challenges, such as terrorism and organized crime; measures aimed at controlling 'mobility' in general have drawn a line between people allowed into the Union and people to be kept out. More to that, some tipping events, suffice here to recall the terrorist attacks against the United States and Europe, have

⁴ While writing (mid October 2013), the death toll in the Mediterranean keeps rising.

led to an intensification of migration controls that have further emphasized the security understanding of the phenomenon.

Thus, the issue has been securitized through a series of processes, including depicting irregular immigrants by sea as an invading horde; releasing inflated statistics; connecting transboundary challenges; interpreting borders as separating walls; and using military devices as governmental tools. Eventually, this understanding, that has broadly characterized the Union and Member States policy on migration and asylum in the last decade, has also informed relations with third countries on the matter. Member States have often back-passed responsibilities on flows management while the erection of barriers has been adopted as first tool to handle 'migration crises'. Ultimately, though, this approach has backfired on the EU, the external and internal credibility thereof seems to be questioned. To perform the role the EU has envisaged for itself it should act coherently and comply with fundamental principles subsumed in its experience. A good part of this process would imply to deviate from a prevalently security interpretation and governance of irregular migration, which looks as short-sided and flawed a strategy to face the phenomenon. That is, an overall process of «de-securitization» would offer a different perspective through which to look at the issue and successfully handle it.

That a security interpretation of irregular flows has progressively been framed through time is largely demonstrated in the case investigated in this work that considers how 'security' has played out in relations with one of the most important transit routes to Europe and how it has then contributed to the interpretation and management of crises which have occurred in last years. Thus, focusing on people irregularly en route to Europe, this work discusses the relations established between Libya, Italy and the European Union⁵. As a matter of fact, the analysis of EU policy towards Libya cannot overlook the pressure Italy has exerted in order to influence the agenda on irregular immigration and to define (through the multiple channels it had available) the cooperation schedule. Being the first country to re-approach Libya, Italy has helped Libya re-establish normal relations with other international players and has ably exploited the relationship to influence the European approach and cooperation patterns on the issue. As such, this study looks at parallel discursive fields and policy developments to see how they interacted with one another: that is, securitization dynamics, intended here both in terms of discourses and practices together with the so-called 'security governance' of migration are scrutinized. Adopting this theoretical framework does not invalidate the contributions provided by mainstream approaches, which have also investigated the ways in which security issues emerge out of unwanted

⁵ For other works on Italian –Libyan relations see for example Paoletti (2010) and Mezran and Varvelli (2012).

movements of people. Instead, this specific theoretical exercise seems to insert particularly well within an overall reflection on security, its understanding, its dynamics and its implications in this peculiar international scenario. Also, undertaking this type of effort allows not only to understand how migration has been framed in security terms and why but also to find potential tendencies at «de-securitization».

Hence, the first chapter of this volume argues that the broader scope of 'security' after the end of the Cold War has paved the way for the consideration of new security challenges, among which unwanted movements have figured prominently. While representing the main trigger event of this overall re-thinking process, the end of the Cold War is among other factors preceding and following it accounting for the progressive unease with the migration phenomena. In the European Union, irregular inflows have mainly looked at with reference to internal and external developments related to the removal of internal barriers, such as for example the growing number of 'unwanted' persons, the terrorist attacks against the United States and the enlargement process towards an unstable eastern frontier. The reasons that dig deeper into this 'uneasy' feeling and that investigate how the irregular crossing of borders has come to represent a security concern are detailed below in the analysis on Libya.

Chapter two emphasizes that because of the transnational nature of new security challenges, coordination efforts should ideally encompass a variegated set of actors and strategies at various levels. This is why the literature has made increased use of the term 'security governance': the term seems to better mirror ongoing security efforts with comparison to other traditional concepts. The term looks even more promising if one rests more on the 'security' part of the expression, and reflects on the possibility of shared security understandings which, in turn, drive towards coordination efforts. With a specific emphasis on security interdependences, the «security complex» theory allows explaining the rationale behind coordination attempts within regional contexts. Given the cross-border nature of challenges (as migration is), it is easily deductible, patterns of cooperation with regions (or countries) where irregular flows originate or transit come automatically into the equation. And yet, it is explained, the security understanding applied to the matter ends up complicating the coordination game both within and between regional contexts as the remainder of the volume makes clear.

The third chapter of the volume closes the part exploring the context where relations between Libya, Italy and the European Union have progressively developed. As the theoretical inputs provided suggest, due to the ability of irregular flows to by-pass or eschew controls at the borders, the EU and Member States have found it paramount to encompass origin and transit countries in the Mediterranean in migration management. Thus, these latter have been called to strengthen internal legislation and build capabilities

on irregular flows control. Patterns of cooperation have been established at the regional but particularly at the bilateral level: every country has opened a cooperation chapter with the Union and many more with single states. Developments in this sense have impacted on flows direction: closure or intensification of controls in a geographical spot has diverted flows towards other routes, causing those security interdependences discussed before. Libya has both resented and been an active promoter of these dynamics.

Chapter four offers a detailed presentation of the pattern of cooperation established between Libya, Italy and the European Union covering years 1998-2010. The relevance of Libya as a springboard for irregular migration to Europe has always been acknowledged. And yet, coming to terms with the country has never been easy, first because of the marginalization of the state with respect to the international community and second because of the unpredictable guidance of its leader, which has constantly played the immigration card both in the region and with the European Union to advance its own interests. National competences on migration and asylum let Italy unilaterally approach Libya, a fact favoured by the colonial legacy linking them. Thus, Italy has played as a forerunner in cooperation with the country and has contributed to set the agenda at the European level thanks to the running of the European Union Presidency in 2003. Stopping irregular inflows has been the priority of all colours of the Italian political spectrum, although the tones and the negotiation modalities have differed. The European Union has moved exhibiting a double-track strategy: capacity-building in the country and improvements of human rights records in the same. Absent an effective framework of cooperation, though, the reach of the EU has mainly passed through the financing of programmes related to both objectives.

Chapter five and six go deeper into the security framing processes. If in Chapter one the argument is made that irregular flows have increasingly raised concerns in the European Union these parts delve into the structuring of the issue, both in discursive and practical terms. That is, through the insights provided by the Copenhagen school of thought and the Paris approach an effort is made to explore which arguments have been made, why a 'security' interpretation of the matter has emerged and while, instead, a 'humanitarian' interpretation, for example, has not emerged and how the security approach has kept feeding itself. Limiting the analysis to the research focus, that is to relations between Libya, Italy and the European Union, this part of the work unpacks security dynamics to see how they substantiate and in which contexts they better apply. Because of their complementary features (one school relies more on discourses, the other on practices; one focuses on emergency situations and tipping events, the other on normal procedures; one applies better to the national realm, the other at the European level; one points attention on political leaders and actors and the other on security agencies) and the

reciprocal influence both theoretical approaches seem to provide useful suggestions on the security governance at play on irregular flows.

Chapter seven sheds light on the criticisms that have arisen around the governance of migration, something which further confirms the belief that a security approach to the matter has prevailed over other possible paths. The governance that has resulted out of it has uncovered shortcomings on many fronts, widely pointed out. First of all, some of the practices to remove irregular migrants have been considered in breach of the main conventions on basic human rights protection. Second, activities such as screening and profiling were supposed to lead to discrimination practices and further complicate the management of the issue. Third, relying on authoritarian regimes for the control of irregular flows has contributed to the unpredictability of migration management and has been proven to endanger migrants' lives, for the reason that these countries' records on protection are extremely poor. Moreover, surveillance structures and systems established in the Mediterranean seemed to encourage migrants to undertake more dangerous crossings, ending up entrapped most of the times in the nets of human trafficking practices. Ultimately, such an approach has proved ineffective, as flows continue to reach European shores copiously.

The eruption of the so-called Arab Springs represented a further test to the interpretation attached to irregular flows towards Europe; this time, though, as discussed in Chapter eight, the matter was largely nested with major phenomena, such as the military intervention that toppled the Gaddafi's regime and the massive inflow of refugees reaching Italian shores. Thus, to be put under the spotlight was not only the Italian approach to the phenomenon but also the EU's stance toward an issue strongly concerning its self-image and actorness at the international level. And yet, the security dimension loomed large on both playing-fields. Security alarms prevailed in the first part of the crisis and until the decision undertaken by Italy to participate in operation *Unified Protector*; after that, the security approach has been mainly manifested through the governance of the matter unfolded, testifying to the general inability of the country to soundly adapt and adjust its own policies and practices through time to such 'crises'. At the European level, the lack of solidarity among Member States was the bluntest example of the security interpretation attached to the phenomenon together with the absence of a truly common European approach to asylum. Alas, these shortcomings represented themselves in the late summer of 2013 when thousands of people in need of protection tried to make their way to Europe, often dying tragically close to its shores.

Chapter nine provides a snapshot of how the drawing of many people in need of protection and especially searching for safety in Europe has been received by the Italian and European political establishment. While it is too

early to envision how the situation will evolve, two preliminary observations can be made: first, security talks have shifted their focus towards migrants, so that a new and hopefully inspiring attention is paid to them; second, if dealing with crises always implies facing emergency situations, the 2013 events show that not much has been done in regular time to modify the governance approach adopted thus far. Answers provided are those envisaged to manage irregular flows in general; Italy's poorly improved structural problems keep overburdening the management of the challenge; and the EU struggles to show a resolve that, due to the parochial interests of its Member States, is both limited and mined by security traits.

Together with the conclusion some tentative recommendations close this work.