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Assessing the production and impact of migration narratives

The impact of narratives on policy-making at the national level

The case of Italy

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Reviewers

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Contents

Abstract

Unplanned migration (especially by sea) has dominated the history of Italian migration policy over the last 30 years. Although subsequent waves of arrivals have differed in terms of causes, scale and landing points, forced migration flows have constantly played a key role in both public debate and policy responses. The way in which migration has been addressed in public discourses is characterised by certain recurring features, such as the idea of migration as a security threat to be dealt with security-driven measures, the metaphor of arrivals as a 'siege'; or the emphasis on human suffering and deaths at sea that influenced the development of a humanitarian narrative.

Following the conceptual and methodological framework developed by the [BRIDGES Work Package 7 concept note](#) (Boswell and Smellie 2023), the aim of this working paper is to analyse how recurrent elements of certain narratives circulate in the communicative (media and political arenas) and in the coordinative spheres (the one of policy making) at different levels in the Italian political system. The study focuses on three specific events occurred in 2015 (the adoption of the EU relocation scheme), 2017 (the initial stage of a process of 'criminalisation' of NGOs) and in 2022 (the Ukrainian crisis) and addresses the question of how event-related narratives resonate with the master narratives on migration that emerged in the 2012–2022-time frame.

Keywords: narratives, policy, politics, crisis, refugees, Ukraine, NGOs

1. Introduction

International migration to Italy started to grow and gain salience in the early 1980s, but 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall marked a turning point, with a steady increase in unplanned arrivals from Albania and the Balkans. The first comprehensive law on immigration was the Turco Napolitano Law of 1998 (named after two moderate-left ministers of the time), which in its original form aimed to reconcile reception, containment and public order measures. In the 2000s, the number of resident foreigners continued to rise and migration as an issue started to play a central role in the public debate and in electoral campaigns.

Unplanned migration (especially by sea) has thus dominated the history of Italian migration policy over the last 30 years. Although subsequent waves of arrivals have differed in terms of causes, scale and landing points, forced migration flows have constantly played a key role in both public debate and policy responses. The European dimension of the national debate (with a strong focus on the alleged 'injustice' of the 'Dublin system') has been gradually gaining salience, especially since the increase of arrivals across the Central Mediterranean which followed the 2011 'Arab spring'.

Against this background, the way in which migration has been addressed in public discourses is characterised by certain recurring features, such as the idea of migration as a security threat to be dealt with security-driven measures; the metaphor of arrivals as a 'siege'; the idea that Italy is punished for its position at the EU's external border and by the lack of solidarity from EU institutions and other member states; the emphasis on human suffering and deaths at sea that influenced the development of a humanitarian narrative.

The aim of this study is to analyse how these recurring *topoi* are taken up by structured narratives, and how such narratives circulated in the communicative (media and political arenas) and in the coordinative spheres (the one of policy making) at different levels in the Italian political system. We apply the Jones and McBeth's (2010) Narrative Policy Framework and Schmidt's (2008) conceptualisation of the 'communicative' and 'coordinative' spheres in policy-making. While politics (or the communicative sphere) can be characterised as the competitive mobilisation of public support by political parties, coordinative discourse is oriented at mobilising the engagement and coordinating the activities of those actors involved in delivering policies. It thus invokes a more specialised, 'technocratic' audience. We thus introduce a distinction between 'lay' and 'technocratic' narratives (see WP7 Concept Note, Boswell and Smellie 2023): our concept of 'lay narratives' refers to certain features of the narrative such as simple, intuitive, and often highly emotive stories designed to be accessible and compelling to a broad public audience; by contrast, 'technocratic' narratives are oriented at coordinating the actions of those elaborating and implementing policy and are more sober, factual and evidenced-based. Nonetheless, the study shows that there can be considerable overlap in the content of lay and technocratic narratives circulating in the two spheres.

The report is divided in two parts. We will first explore how narratives on migration have evolved in the political debate over the past decade. Second, we will look at how narratives are taken up in different policymaking venues, by focusing on two processes: the circulation of narratives in the communicative sphere (across the media and in political debates); and the patterns of influence (the transformativity power) of such narratives on the policy-making arena. We will do so by focusing on three specific events taking place in three distinct historical

moments (the adoption of the EU relocation scheme in 2015; the initial stage of a process of 'criminalisation' of NGOs in 2017 and the Ukrainian crisis in 2022) and by exploring how event-related narratives resonate with the master narratives on migration that emerged in the 2012–2022-time frame. In order to understand and process the circulation of narratives among the media, political and policy sphere, we introduce a new typology that refers to four possible relationships: embracing/mirroring; adapting; rejecting or ignoring. We will thus analyse for each case study whether the most recurrent narratives in each arena were mirrored, adapted, rejected or ignored in the others.

2. Background and National Context

2.1 Key narratives on migration

Migration narratives, in the Italian case, are deeply influenced by the extreme politicisation of the issue and by the geographical position of the country. The perception of and discourse 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 has played a significant role in the development of migration policies as well as in the evolution of narratives on migration. As a frontline state, Italy has been constantly torn between securitarian and humanitarian narratives and policies (Ceccorulli, 2019).

The security narrative already emerged in the 1990s, when migration was mainly treated as a police concern and considered a security risk. Immigration was presented as a phenomenon that concerns 'people who bring problems' and are dangerous for the integrity of the national borders and for national security (Maneri, 2019). Direct links between discourses on governing migration and discourses on security were established. Since the late 1990s, a criminalization narrative exploded in the Italian media, at the same time as the mass arrivals from Albania and the birth of the Northern League. According to this narrative, migrants were the main perpetrators of crimes and were to be sanctioned accordingly. The same narrative was transposed at a political and policy level until the late 2000s when irregular entry and stay were formally criminalised (Palidda, 2011).

Since the late 1990s/early 2000s, and then especially in the aftermath of the Arab Springs and of the outbreak of the conflict in Libya, an emergency narrative dominated public discourses. Migrant arrivals in Italy have been described as 'emergencies' irrespectively of their frequency and of actual numbers. Each new arrival was perceived, framed, and dealt with as an emergency. In terms of policies as well, the management of migration in Italy has always been framed (and implemented) as the management of an emergency. Another narrative that emerged from the intersection of the security and emergency narratives is the 'siege metaphor', according to which migration is represented as a siege at the national borders (Maneri and Quassoli, 2016). The metaphor is particularly powerful because it tends to legitimise exceptional policies, while at the same time reinforcing the opposition between the alleged 'besieged' and the 'besiegers'. The siege metaphor is often accompanied by the idea that the country has to bear a disproportionate burden in managing migration flows, which is shared by both centre-left and centre-right parties (Terlizzi, 2019): Italy is thus portrayed as a victim of the 'attack', left alone to 'face the siege' by the EU and other member states. The

narrative related to the lack of support at the EU/Member State level can be found in the media and in the political debate under both the centre-left government (2013-2018) and the subsequent populist government (2018-2019), composed of members of the populist and anti-elite 'Movimento Cinque Stelle' (Five Star Movement) and the far-right party Lega Nord (Northern League). Overall, a sort of collective victim frame (i.e. Italy left alone by 'Europe') is very common. This means that the question of 'who is responsible?' is more usefully reconceptualised as 'who is to blame for this defeat?' (Pogliano and Ponzo, 2018).

During the so-called refugee crisis, the media and political focus was twofold. On the one hand, the securitarian narrative did not disappear, targeting both migrants and solidarity actors. On the other hand, and especially in 2013-2015 a humanitarian narrative was brought to the forefront. Such a narrative is linked to the solidaristic attitude of civil society organisations or Catholic groups towards refugees, which predates the increasing politicisation of migration. In 2013, the humanitarian narrative emerged as a key driver of policymaking, as with the launch of 'Mare Nostrum' (a large-scale search and rescue operation launched by the centre-left Letta government in 2013). However, the recent framing of migration in humanitarian terms is often linked to a process of victimisation of migrants and refugees that denies their agency, reflected in the 'victim frame' of media discourses (Pogliano, 2019). In general, the humanitarian narrative tends to be limited to a specific event/time/context: at some point, it fades and the security/siege narrative regains centrality. Since 2015, the narrative of compassion and empathy towards migrants/refugees has been complemented by the representation of migrants as a threat to national/European borders. Such a 'flip-flop regime of humanitarian/security discourse' became a common feature of Italian and European narratives after the so-called refugee crisis (Maneri and Quassoli, 2016).

The criminalisation narrative powerfully re-emerged in 2015-2016, shifting the focus from migrants as victims to migrants as invaders or smugglers. Smugglers were targeted by the media and political discourse as cruel criminals who bear the responsibility for migrant deaths at sea. Later, this discourse was extended to anyone who offered help to migrants during their journey, including NGOs involved in rescue operations. As we will see in greater detail (section 2.3) the criminalisation of NGOs in the media was accompanied by the adoption of judicial and policy measures to control and limit NGO operations.

Another narrative that builds on both the emergency frame and the security one emerged with regard to the topic of the reception system of asylum seekers. The salience of the issue significantly increased following the arrivals of asylum seekers in 2014-2015 and the political debate in the following years was filled by discourses linking the reception system with criminal networks. The reception dimension became a 'battelfield', where members of different arenas (in terms of political affiliation as well as of the level of governance) debated the way resources were distributed (Campomori, Ambrosini, 2020). Populist parties (Northern League, Brothers of Italy and Movement Five Stars) stressed the links between corruption and asylum seekers reception, and the fact that national resources were devoted (and wasted) on the reception system instead of being deployed to support Italians. This narrative reinforces the idea of migrants as both a security and economic threat.

Finally, when exploring narratives on migration in the Italian political context, it is worth acknowledging that centrist and even left-wing politicians have often shown a propensity to at least partly embrace, although usually in a belated and milder way, the security narrative

initially proposed by right-wing politicians. The security master narratives have always prevailed in the Italian migration discourse (Pogliano, 2019). Right-wing politicians and media have been able to impose these narratives, making centrist and left-wing politicians overall timid and unassertive when talking about migration. Rather than offering an alternative frame, centrist and left-wing politicians, as well as the media (including mainstream outlets) often ended up adopting a milder version of the same frame, as if it were not possible to talk about migration without talking about security.

2.2 Politics and policy developments in 2012-2022

The last decade has been characterised by a shift in the policy focus from legal/labour migration to asylum/border control policies. Since the outburst of the sovereign debt crisis in 2011, the number of legal entries for working purposes through annual government decrees (so called Decreto Flussi) was drastically reduced in numbers. Until 2010, legal entries for working purposes in Italy represented more than half of the total number of legal entries per year. In 2019 entries for work accounted for 6% only of total legal entries. Only in 2021 and 2022 was there a cautious reopening of legal labour migration channels, with caps of 67,000 and 82,000 new admissions, respectively.

FIGURE 1: Chronology of the main political/policy developments in the field of migration (2012-2023)
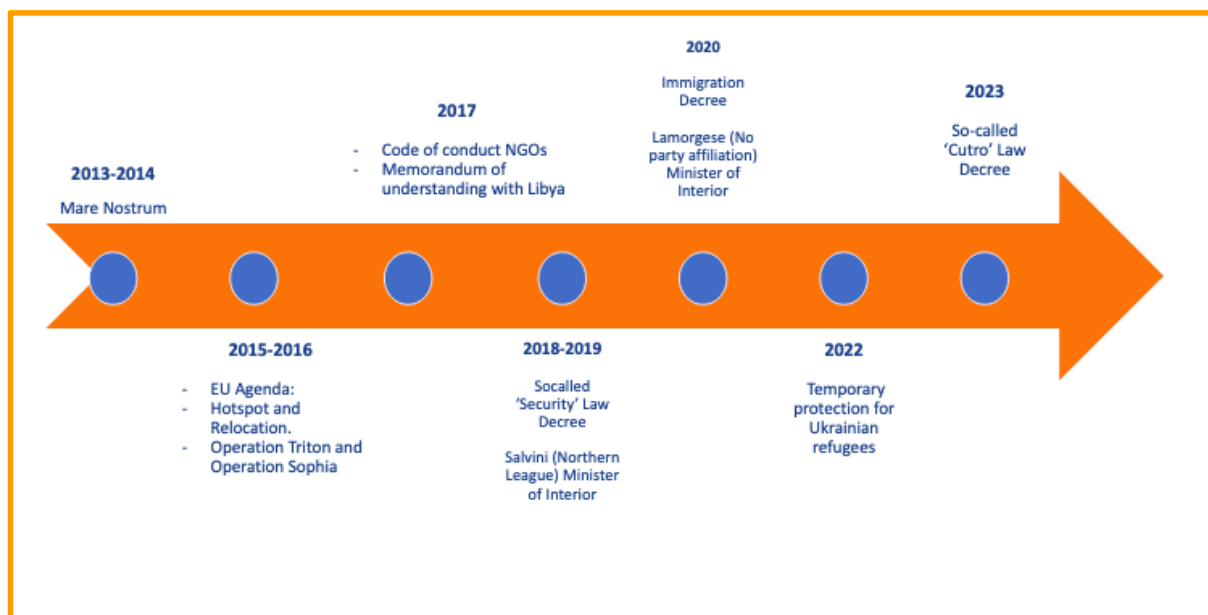
Source: own elaboration

While both legal migration policies and migrant integration policies have been neglected in the last decade, two (once marginal) policy fields received central attention, both linked to the increasingly salient and mediatised phenomenon of forced migration. These are: first, irregular migration control policies aimed at preventing people from reaching Italy mainly through cooperation with third countries of origin and transit; and second, asylum-seekers reception policies. Both policies, and particularly the second one, have been dominated by an 'emergency' approach, which gained currency largely because of the failure to adopt

comprehensive legislation and policies regarding the various aspects of the phenomenon, and above all to enforce effective implementation of reception and integration (Colucci, 2022).

This left space for 'exceptional measures', e.g. in the asylum seekers reception system (Ponzo, Giannetto and Roman, 2022). Both border control and asylum reception policies have been marked by policy and legislative changes between 2013 and 2022 at every change of government (see table 1).

a) Irregular migration control policies and 'search and rescue' policies

The first policy solution implemented in October 2013 (the so-called Mare Nostrum operation), as a reaction to a tragic shipwreck in which 368 people died, was presented as a military and humanitarian operation with two goals: saving migrant lives and countering irregular immigration. It saved about 150,000 people and was active for one year, until 31 October 2014. In November 2014, it was substituted by a joint EU SAR operation called Triton, which was not similarly informed by a strong humanitarian approach, and focused instead on migration control. The two main narratives during these years (security and humanitarianism) coexisted with the 'Mare Nostrum' policy solution.

In spring 2015 the EU launched another military operation in the Central Mediterranean called 'EUNAVFOR Med – Operation Sophia' aimed at tackling migrant smuggling and trafficking. Here the humanitarian goal of saving lives has been completely abandoned and substituted by explicit immigration control and security purposes. The militarisation and securitisation of naval operations in the Mediterranean was accompanied by the criminalisation of solidarity actors which carried out search and rescue operations. In Italy, the criminalisation of NGOs involved in SAR operations started in 2017 through judicial investigations. The same year the Ministry of Interior imposed on NGOs the obligation to sign a Code of Conduct in order to keep conducting SAR operations (see case study 3, par. 2.3).

The Lega Nord-Movimento Cinque Stelle (Northern League-Five Star Movement) government that followed (2018-2019) marked an even more restrictive turn in Italian migration control policy. Its Interior Minister Salvini implemented the so-called 'closed ports policy' which consisted of denying authorisation to land to the few NGOs still involved in SAR operations in the Central Mediterranean, leaving rescued migrants for days (even weeks) at sea. Salvini also introduced legislation aiming at allowing for the confiscation of NGO's ships, a policy that was eased but not abolished by the subsequent Ministry of Interior (Lamorgese) in charge between 2019 and 2022.

Another main pillar of Italian border security strategy is the externalisation of immigration control to third countries, and in particular cooperation with Libyan authorities. Such policies are grounded on a mix of securitised and humanitarian discourses, as the agreements have been justified as a tool to prevent migrants' loss of lives in the Mediterranean (Panebianco, 2016). Over the last decade, cooperation with Libya gained momentum in particular during the centre-left Gentiloni government (2016-2018) that intensified cooperation with Tripoli (2017 Memorandum of Understanding and subsequent implementation negotiations). The purpose was to reduce the peak in migrant arrivals reached in the years 2014-2016 by stopping migrants before they left the country (or before they reached the Italian SAR zone). The Italy-Libya Memorandum has been renewed twice by the different governmental coalitions (in 2019

by the coalition between the Democratic Party and the Five Stars Movement and in 2022 by the right-wing Meloni government), showing the transversal consensus over the maintenance of such a measure.

b) Asylum policy and reception policy

The significant rise in the number of asylum seekers approaching Italy and Europe since 2014 led both the centre-left and right-populist governments to implement several policy and legislative reforms on the substantive and procedural rights of asylum seekers, as well as on their reception and integration schemes (see the table at the beginning of the section). Between 2014-2016 key actors of reception were significantly involved in the decision-making and major reforms to expand and improve the system were formulated and implemented (Ponzo, 2023). Nonetheless, the EU's introduction of the 'hotspot approach' in 2015 as a consequence of the refugee crisis represented a significant challenge for Italy and the initial reception of migrants was characterised by degrading living conditions and several breaches of migrants' fundamental rights.

The Lega-Movimento Cinque Stelle coalition that followed adopted additional restrictive reception policies, which ended up limiting access to protection in Italy and reducing refugee rights. In particular, the Salvini Decree (Law Decree 113/2018) excluded asylum seekers from accessing integration services, significantly lowering reception standards for asylum seekers. In 2020 a new decree (Law Decree 130/2020) adopted by the centre-left government which followed, reformed the national reception system (changing its name to SAI – Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione, Reception and Integration System); and restored the possibility for asylum seekers to access integration and socio-economic inclusion services.

Finally, the government led by Fratelli d'Italia approved two laws on migration-related matters: law N. 1/2023 imposed several constraints on NGOs that carry out rescue operations at sea. Urgency decree 20/2023, then converted into law 50/2023 (adopted in response to a deadly shipwreck that occurred in February 2023) aimed at suppressing the 2020 reforms: it excluded asylum seekers from the SAI reception system and further limited the integration services provided by the reception system and expanded the possibilities of detaining asylum seekers during the so-called border procedures. On the other hand, it simplified the procedures for obtaining labour-visas to enter the country, aiming at re-opening a season of migration policies and more labour-centres.

2.3 Public attitudes towards immigration in 2012-2022

Public attitudes towards immigrants have shown significant changes over the last decade, both in terms of the salience of the matter and with regard to anti-immigrant attitudes. According to a 2021 Eurobarometer survey, migration was not perceived as an important issue faced by the country in 2012-2013 (see Figure 2)[1]. The perception began to change in the following years. The percentage of respondents who considered immigration one of the most serious issues faced by Italy increased in 2014-2015 and peaked at the end of 2016 (42%). It remained fairly stable in 2017 and 2018, and it decreased in 2019 and 2020. In 2021 and 2022, the percentage of respondents for whom migration was one of the main problems was lower than in 2014 (less

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[1] Standard Eurobarometer 96, *Question: Do Italians think that migration is a significant problem for Italy?*, 2022.

than 10%). The downward trend did not change following the Ukrainian crisis and the resulting influx of refugees (5% in July 2022).

The trend is similar when the question relates to the most important issues faced by Europe[2], while it is important to note that the percentage is overall higher compared to the national one: for instance, in November 2015 migration was the most important European problem for 49% of respondents; one year later (November 2016) the percentage is similar (48%). It slowly decreased between 2019 and 2021, and consistently in 2022 (5%).

FIGURE 2. Standard Eurobarometer, Question: Do Italians think that migration is a significant problem for Italy?, 2022
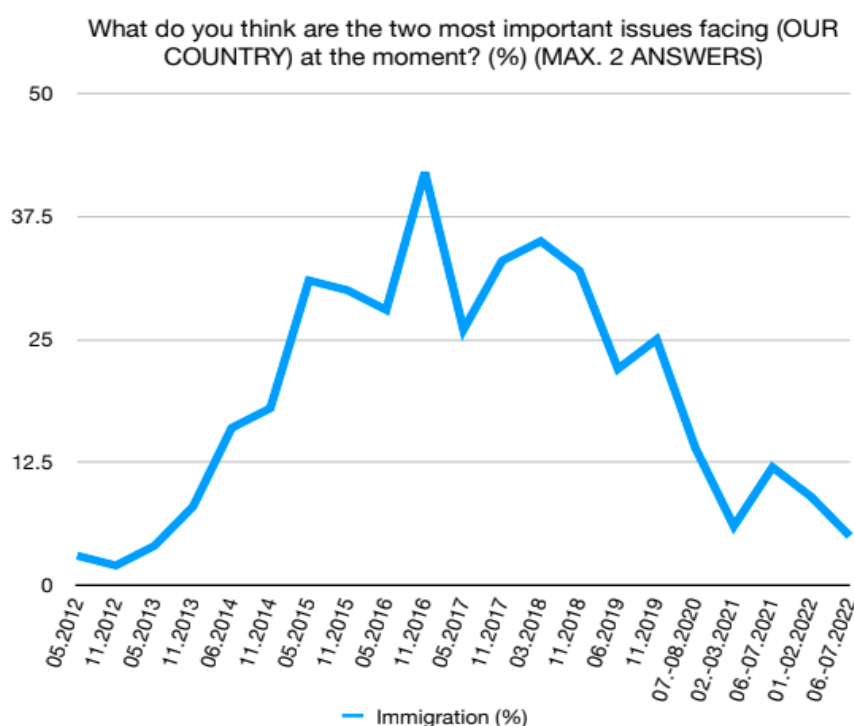
Source: Eurobarometer

According to a national poll that records the percentage of respondents agreeing to the sentence 'Immigrants are a danger for public order and security', immigration was increasingly considered a threat to public order and national security between 2006 and 2008, and then between 2015 and 2018 (see Demos & Pi[3], 2021).

A 2019 IPSOS poll also showed that the 'invasion' narratives had a significant impact on the public[4]: on average, respondents estimated the share of immigrants at 31%, while the real figure in 2019 was 9%. This perception is in line with the 2017 Eurobarometer data[5], where respondents estimated the share of foreigners at 24.6%, while the real figure in 2017 was

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[2] Standard Eurobarometer 96, *Question: Do Italians think that migration is a significant problem for Europe?,* 2022.
[3] Demos & Pi, *Survey: Are immigrants perceived as a threat for public order and national security?*, Repubblica, 27.9.2021.
[4] IPSOS, *Ciak Migration. Investigating the perception of immigration in Italy*, 10.10.2019.
[5] Eurobarometer, *Integration of immigrants into the European Union - Italy*, 2022.

7.0%, according to Eurostat. In addition, 33% of respondents believed that the majority of crimes committed in Italy could be attributed to immigrants and 40% were convinced that migrants could pose a terrorist threat.

According to a recent IAI (Istituto Affari Internazionali)[6] poll in 2022, only 14% of respondents believed that migration management was the most important issue to face, while 80% of respondents approved the decision to grant temporary protection status to Ukrainians. The survey also shows a consensus on border control and externalisation measures in the Mediterranean: support for tough measures to deal with the flow of migrants from Libya has risen slightly in the 2022 survey. While support for interceptions at sea remains at the same level as in 2021 (34%), while support for sending military personnel to Libya to re-establish border control rose (from 26% to 29%). Taken together, these two highly restrictive options attract a large majority of support.

According to a poll published on *La Repubblica*[7], in the second half of 2022 immigration once again become the main concern for Italian citizens: as of June 2023, 43% of Italians consider immigration as a public security threat .

Finally, we conducted a quantitative analysis on the articles that appeared between 2012 and 2022 in Il Corriere della Sera (using Nexis database) in order to grasp the salience of the migration issue in the mainstream media over the last decade. The analysis show that the peak of salience was reached in the summers of 2015, 2017 and 2018, with 66, 63 and 65 articles on migration appearing in Il Corriere respectively. The trend gradually slowed down in 2019 and 2020, but increased in January and November 2022 (42 and 46 articles respectively).

FIGURE 3. Salience of migration in Il Corriere della Sera (2012-2022)
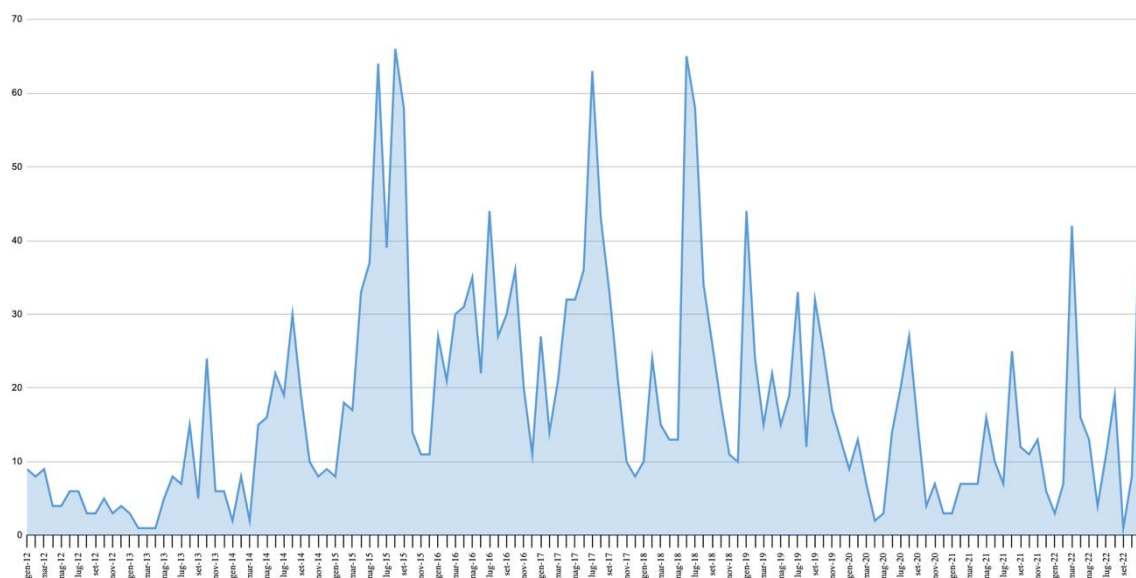
Source: Nexis Uni

[6] IAI, *Italians and migration: not all refugees are equal*, 10.10.2022.
[7] Ilvo Diamanti, *Fear of immigrants is back*, Repubblica, 4.6.2023.

2.4 Selection of case studies

The following section focuses on the circulation of narratives between the communicative and coordinative spheres (Schmidt, 2008) and on the type of narratives that are most likely to influence policy making (Garcés-Mascarenas and Pastore, 2022), taking into account three specific events that occurred between 2012 and 2022. All three 'episodes' are characterized by an intense political debate and, they have all resulted in the implementation of specific policies changes.

The three events, which were selected because of their salience at European level (case studies 1 and 2) or at national level (case study 3), are: the migrant relocation policies in European member states (2015); the response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis (2022); the criminalisation of search and rescue operations by NGOs in Italy (2017). The research method is based on a qualitative application of Jones and McBeth's (2010) Narrative Policy Framework to the narratives that emerged around the three selected episodes. First, we will identify the dominant narratives on migration-related events in the media, through a qualitative analysis based on the three newspapers considered in WP3, representing different political leanings and property models[8]. Most of the articles we analysed (12 for each case study) are comment pieces, and occasionally an editorial is also included among the sources.

The analysis of narratives appearing in the political debates is based on the parliamentary activity with regard to the same three events that took place in a time frame of three months since the outbreak of the event or crisis. We will then study how narratives circulate among the two spheres by referring to the concept of embracing, adapting, ignoring or rejecting. Then, in order to examine the circulation of narratives in the policy domain, we identified policy documents (e.g. Ministers' hearings, policy documents adopted by the Interior Ministry, Parliamentary reports assessing Government policies etc.) published within a year from the event. We will similarly investigate how narratives migrate from the communicative sphere to the coordinative one by looking at typology of embracing, adaptation, ignorance or rejection. Finally, we conducted a few targeted semi-structured interviews (2 with members/former members of Parliament; 2 with civil servants) in order to complement our analysis and fill specific gaps.

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[8] *Il Corriere della sera*, the oldest Italian newspaper and the one with the highest diffusion, is considered the moderate-conservative newspaper of the Northern bourgeoisie. *Il Giornale* is a right-wing newspaper owned by the Berlusconi family that openly supports Forza Italia and its right-wing allies; *Il Fatto quotidiano* is a newspaper established in 2009 by journalists that are its owners, and considers itself to be a watchdog of political corruption and unconstitutional drift. National Report, Italy, WP3.

3. Case studies

3.1 Case study 1: The European migration crisis in 2015 and the EU relocation scheme

a) Introduction to the case within the national context

In 2015, Europe witnessed an unprecedented number of arrivals through the Mediterranean route (1.8 million external border crossings registered by Frontex) and an unexpected increase in the number of asylum applications (1 million between May 2015 and May 2016, according to Eurostat). Italy, together with Greece, was one of the frontline countries facing great logistical and administrative pressure in the reception of asylum seekers.

In May 2015, the European Commission presented its agenda on migration to provide immediate support to these countries in the midst of what is commonly referred to as a 'refugee crisis' or 'asylum crisis'. The exceptional response proposed by the Commission was based on the relocation plan and the *hotspot* approach, showing that Member States' solidarity in receiving asylum seekers had to be combined with responsibility to ensure compliance with EU legislation on the identification and registration of migrants (European Commission, 2015). Relocation was welcomed by the Italian government, even though it would only apply to asylum seekers from countries with a recognition rate above 75% and the plan was to relocate around 160,000 asylum seekers within the EU.

Italy had to implement the *hotspots*, initially established in Lampedusa, Pozzallo, Trapani and Taranto, where procedures to identify beneficiaries of relocation were to be carried out. In September 2015 the Italian authorities drew up a roadmap, followed by standard operating procedures aimed at clarifying the functioning of hotspots and relocation procedures. The burden in terms of reception (or, eventually, detention) facilities was mostly placed in the southern region of Italy (Campesi, 2018). Conversely, between September 2015 and September 2017 (when the relocation plan was officially put on hold), only 34,705 asylum seekers were relocated, of which only 12,706 from Italy ([European Court of Auditors](#), 2019).

b) Narratives in the media

The qualitative media analysis was conducted on news published in September 2015, before the Council meeting (25-26 September) in which the relocation scheme was endorsed. A total of twelve articles, mainly comment pieces, were analysed (four from each newspaper). The salience of the issue of migration in Italian media reached a peak during the summer of 2015 and it occupied a very prominent space in the mediatic sphere during the debate on relocation (for instance, *Il Corriere della Sera* published 58 articles on the issue during September).

One of the most recurrent narratives in the centrist and progressive newspapers on relocation concerned the positive implications of the relocation plan. Both *Il Corriere della Sera* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (the centrist and the progressive newspapers) praised the EU institutions for promoting solidarity measures in favour of Italy and Greece. They criticised those member states that opposed the Commission's plan thus showing a lack of solidarity with both refugees and Italy. Such position echoes the meta-narrative on Italy left alone to carry the burden of the emergency and the disproportionate arrival (equal, siege) of migrants.

Denmark, UK and especially the Central and Eastern European countries forming the 'Visegrad Group' (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) were portrayed as the villains of the story, in a picture where Italy was the victim. The most recurrent plot in *Il Corriere*, using a category based on Stone's work (2002), is a 'story of decline' in which Italy was trapped between continuous arrivals by sea and the impossibility of relieving its reception system. *Il Fatto* criticised the EU in general for pushing Italy to quickly implement the hotspot approach without providing guarantees for subsequent relocation.

In most of the articles, the main protagonists of the narratives are the Member States and the European institutions. Migrants are often absent from the picture (with the exception of a single article in *Il Corriere della Sera* in which migrants are portrayed as victims). The setting is mainly that of the EU political sphere, with references to the national level only to show the difficulties beyond the hotspot approach (in two articles). The moral of the story in both *Il Corriere della Sera* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* usually stressed the need for more unity at EU level and for more dialogue between Member States in order to reach a common solution. *Il Corriere* also emphasised the need to focus not only on reception but also on returns, echoing the master narrative on securitisation of migration that permeates migration policies even in times of emergency. Applying Stone's (2002) categorisation, the plot, in this case, shifts from a 'story of decline' in which Italy is victimised, to a 'story of control' according to which the best policy solution is a security-oriented one (deportations).

The recurring narratives in *Il Giornale* are very different from the previous ones. Germany and Angela Merkel repeatedly feature as villains, with their open-door policy described as a pull factor for migrants and a danger to Europe's security, threatened by Islamic terrorism. On the contrary, *Il Giornale*'s narrative about Hungary was positive, and Orban was presented as a hero for protecting national identity and sovereignty. The only narrative similar to those of other newspapers (which however appeared only once in *Il Giornale*) was a general criticism of the EU and its Member states (mainly France) for failing to reach an agreement on the Commission's relocation plan.

The setting in *Il Giornale* was both the EU and domestic. All the articles focused on Italian politicians: Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and Interior Minister Angelino Alfano were criticised for playing a passive role in the European debate and the Italian government was blamed for not distinguishing between refugees to be protected and economic migrants to be returned: such distinction is a recurrent elements of security narrative on uncontrolled migration flows. *Il Giornale* argued that Italy was not doing enough to ensure that relocation could take place (i.e. not fingerprinting migrants), but then also argued against the plan, since with the relocation mechanism in place, the 'best' migrants would go to Germany and France, while Italy would have to deal with the 'rest'. The articles show some contradictions in putting forward a clear and coherent moral of the story. While the Italian government was portrayed as the villain, Italy as a nation was portrayed as the victim of history: this is the main element which is common to all plots in the three newspapers, which mainly refer to 'stories of decline'. We thus found a bipartisan reference to national interests and a common plot based on an attitude of helplessness.

Overall, the narratives in the media – and particularly in *Il Giornale* – are vivid and urgent, characters are personalised and positions very much polarised. The positions and interests of each State or political actor are described in simplistic terms.

c) Narratives in political debate

The analysis of narratives in the political arena is based on the parliamentary debates in which the issue of migration was discussed and the terms 'migration', 'relocation', 'European agenda', 'hotspot' were mentioned. We identified the following debates as particularly relevant and worth focusing on in more depth:

1) **Hearing of the Prime Minister** on the government's position ahead of the European Council of 25-26 June 2015 and subsequent parliamentary debate (on 24 June 2015);

2) Parliamentary question posed by a member of the parliamentary majority (Partito Democratico - Democratic Party) on legal pathways to Europe (18 September 2015);

3) **Hearing of the Prime Minister** on the Government's position at the European Council of 15-16 October 2015 and subsequent parliamentary debate (14 October 2015);

4) **Hearing of the Ministry of the Interior** on the implementation of initiatives related to the European Agenda on Migration and subsequent parliamentary debate (4 November 2015).

In none of these debates was the issue of relocation *per se* given much specific attention: the setting is always broader, taking into account the issues of solidarity between Member States; the urgency of broader reforms of European migration and asylum policies; and the policies implemented by the government at national level vis-à-vis the public perception of migration. The plot often shifts from a 'story of decline' to a 'story of control', in which the policy solutions put in place by the government or alternative morals advanced by opposition parties are presented as a way to 'gain back control' over migration flows.

In the first debate on 24 June 2015, the Prime Minister and member of the centre-left Democratic Party (Partito Democratico), Matteo Renzi, emphasised that Italy is doing all it can to negotiate fairer policies at EU level. Italy is portrayed as the victim, but the Italian government is the (struggling) hero, while the Visegrad countries are the villains because of their opposition to relocation and, more broadly, to the Dublin reform. The moral of the story was the urgency of reforms at EU level (Dublin, returns etc.) to manage migration more efficiently and fairly. At the same time, the Prime Minister reaffirmed the importance of saving lives while carrying out returns when necessary[9]. Such discourse not only reflects that of the centrist newspaper, but echoes the meta narratives which build on both humanitarianism and security: this reflect the general tendency, analysed in par. 1.2, of juxtaposing security and humanitarian frameworks. A different narrative, according to which the Italian government is a hero for saving lives in the Mediterranean and needs more support at EU level, dominated the question time triggered by a member of the Democratic Party on 18 September. In this case, the moral of the story was based solely on humanitarian considerations, as the proposed opening humanitarian corridors to allow migrants to reach Europe safely.

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[9] «The Italian position is very clear, when we find someone at sea we save their life, because centuries of civilization are worth more than a survey or a point of opinion», Hearing of the Prime Minister on the government's position ahead of the European Council, Matteo Renzi (Prime Minister), p. 56.

The opposition parties all share some components of the government/majority narrative, but differ on others. The narrative of the left-wing opposition party (expressed in the speech of the political coordinator of 'Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà' - SEL) cast the Member states - but also the EU institutions - in the villains' role for their reluctance to adopt a more courageous common policy on migration. The victims were migrants themselves, the moral of the story was to adopt open policies towards migration and to grant humanitarian permits to migrants to allow them to freely circulate among Europe. The peculiarity of such (minoritarian) narrative is that the feature of humanitarianism is not combined with security-oriented policy solutions.

The representative of the populist Five Star Movement (Movimento Cinque Stelle - M5S), Alessandro Di Battista, stressed the need to overcome the Dublin system and criticised the EU institutions for the lack of support in managing a migration 'emergency'. However, a clear populist/conspiracy narrative emerged from his discourse: the victims were Italian citizens who do not receive sufficient economic support because resources are invested/wasted on migration and reception[10]. The villains were both the EU institutions and the Italian government, which is seen as both unprepared and colluding with the globalised financial powers to exploit migration as a source of resources.

The far-right parties Lega Nord e Fratelli d'Italia (Northern League and Brothers of Italy) similarly consider the Italian government to be the main villain for not being able to deal with immigration and for its (weak) policy of allowing more arrivals. However, they also addressed Europe (without mentioning specific Member States) as the villain for not being able to conclude the relocation agreement, and they suggest that the political solution (moral of the story) is to step up efforts on return policy. The main victims are constantly Italian citizens angered by migration.

During the 14 October debate, far-right narratives focused on yet another villain: human traffickers and smugglers, and economic migrants who come to Europe without needing protection. Such narratives resonate with a 'blame-the-victim' approach, which is often found in plots based on a story of regained control. They once again focused on return and deportation as the main political solutions, accompanied by the proposal of a naval blockade off the African coast. The League also echoed the populist narratives introduced by the 5SM, according to which the cooperatives in charge of receiving asylum seekers were taking advantage of the funds and enriching themselves at the expense of Italian taxpayers, presenting them as an 'economic threat'.

Indeed, on 14 October, the scene is mainly national, with the sole exception of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, who refers to the European level by once again praising its own government for having taken the issue to the supranational level: both Renzi and the Ministry of Interior Alfano stressed in their intervention on 4 November that the issue of solidarity was being discussed by Member States because of Italy's efforts. Moreover, they focused on the fact that a key component of the EU agenda, along with relocation and the hotspot approach, is the return policy. The coalition's narrative constantly straddles the humanitarian and securitarian aspects of migration governance.

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[10] «The current political system exploits emergencies only to enrich itself. Immigration has become a new form of public funding for parties». Hearing of the Prime Minister on the government's position ahead of the European Council, Alessandro Dibattista (M5S), p. 61.

The narrative style of the debate is overall vivid and dominated by references to a 'crisis', but while the government speeches tend to be fact-based and refer to policy developments (which can be read as a mix of lay and technocratic style), the discourses of Movement 5 Stars and far-right parties are characterised by populist features, such as dramatic plots, blame attribution, moralising solutions: their style is markedly lay.

d) Analysis of the relationship between media and political narratives

The analysis of media and political debates shows the emergence of three main narratives, which are either reflected, adapted or partially ignored between the two spheres. No case of outright rejection was found. In all narratives, the relocation is never the main element of the plot, whereas the focus is much more on the migration 'crisis' and on the national interest against the background of the EU response.

The core of the first of such narratives is that migration is manageable if it is addressed at the EU level. In this framework, Italy mainly stands out as a victim, due to EU's failures and imposition of the hotspot approach. The relocation scheme is presented as the policy solution and those member states (especially the Visegrad countries) that opposed the plan are the villains. The Commission plays a controversial role, being both a positive character for promoting the relocation and a negative one for failing to deliver on its promises. This narrative was present in the parliamentary debate in June, then it became dominant in the media (in two out of three newspapers) and was finally taken up by majority coalition parties in subsequent months. We can thus hypothesise a relation of causality, according to which the narrative emerged in the political debate, was then taken up and amplified by the media and ultimately influenced subsequent political debates.

The second narrative is based on a rearrangement and recombination of the main elements described so far but revolves around the need to strictly manage migratory flows in order to stop them: in this case the plot is initially constructed around a story of decline (which is most dominant in the media) and then it turns into a story of control (more present in the political arena). The Italian government is criticised for its open/humanitarian policy and its weak position in Europe, but at the same time Member States were also criticised for the failure of the relocation. Italy and Italians are portrayed as the real victims. The moral is always based on a securitarian approach. Such a narrative is dominant in the right-wing press and in the far-right's discourses in Parliament, being a clear example of a narrative embraced by the far right in both communicative venues.

A third narrative rejects the security approach of the centre-left government and of populist oppositions and focuses on humanitarian solutions such as humanitarian corridors or the issuance of residence permits. This latter narrative is quite exceptional and reflects a broader humanitarian master narrative, but it can only be found in the positions of left parties, and not in the media (not even in the progressive newspaper).

Against this background, the analysis of the political debates showed that the narratives deployed in the media were adapted and enriched with additional elements, showing a more complex and fragmented setting. All politicians linked the narratives to purely national dynamics, such as the feelings of the national public and the actors involved in the reception system implemented by the government. In the political debate we often found references to

the meta-narrative that links the asylum reception system to a waste of resources or criminality, a master narrative that is virtually absent in the newspaper articles we analysed.

Coalition members (especially the Ministry of the Interior) adapted the first narrative by advancing a political solution, according to which joint EU efforts should also address return policy: the government mobilised a specific narrative in order to support a preferred policy solution. Interestingly, the focus on returns as the moral of the story was also common to far-right parties. Deportations as the main moral of the story surface as a bipartisan element, which was only marginally present in the media (only in one article of the centrist newspaper) but plays a very relevant role in political narratives.

Finally, political debates show that both far-right and anti-establishment parties tend to introduce populist positions, sometimes embedded in conspiracy theories, into (all) debates on migration and solidarity. The positions are expressed in a very rhetorical and simplistic way. The language of political debates is as 'lay' as that of the media, but if possible even more divisive and provocative as far as populist parties are concerned. They often do not propose a concrete moral of the story (conceived as a political solution), except for the provocative solutions of closing borders, navy blockades, or very generalistic 'stricter policies' as in 'the good old days'. The most populist stances can thus be found in the political debate, whereas the media seemed to scale down partially the most 'lay' declarations.

e) *Narratives in policy-making documents*

A preliminary remark should be made regarding the analysis of the narratives in the policy documents. Since relocation was an EU policy aimed at benefiting Italy and Greece and implemented at the EU level, Italian policy documents did not directly address relocation or the (secondary) movements of migrants to other EU countries. Nevertheless, the interview with the Former Head of Department of Immigration (Ministry of Interior Office),[11] allowed us to identify a few documents that have some connection with relocation policy or with an ex-post evaluation of the 2015 European Agenda. The documents are:

- **The Standard Operational Procedures (SOP)** adopted on 27 May 2016 to implement the hotspot approach. This document addresses primarily those actors (police and border authorities) in charge of the implementation of the approach. It reveals the strong link between migration controls (hotspots approach) and solidarity measures (relocation);

- **The report of the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on reception and detention centres**, adopted on 3 May 2016, which is relevant insofar as it mentions relocation and the hotspot approach. The document aims at investigating and evaluating reception policies implemented by the Government in 2015 and addresses both the Members of the Parliament and the government itself;

- **The hearing of the Head of the Immigration Department**, Mario Morcone, before the Parliamentary Committee for the Monitoring of the Implementation of the Schengen Agreement (19 October 2016); as for to the second document, the hearing is indented

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[11] Interview n.3.

as a form of overview of the Parliament of the objectives and results of governmental policies.

In both policy documents, the setting ranges between the European and national policy levels, focusing on the implementation of the components of the European agenda that concern Italy. The relocation is clearly linked to the efforts to make the hotspots work, in coordination with the EU agencies. The SOP presents the EU Council as the hero for the activation of the relocation plan. Italian authorities and EU agencies are also presented as positive characters, as they are responsible for the opening up of the solidarity principle, even if it was «at the cost of giving up some sovereign powers»[12].

More generally, European institutions play an ambiguous role: on the one hand, they are seen as partners of the Italians and play a supportive role; on the other hand, they are the ones who forced Italy to implement the hotspot approach (as a counterpart to relocation) and who direct the actions of the Italian authorities. The overall moral of the story that emerges from the SOP is the need to implement a more controlled management of arrivals and to register and identify migrants in accordance with EU requirements. The importance of cooperation between EU and Italian authorities is also presented as a solution to better control migration.

The link between relocation and hotspots also emerged in the 2016 parliamentary inquiry. Once again, the main plot is based on a story of control, in which Italy is portrayed as the main positive character, taking responsibility for the reception of asylum seekers. The villains are the Member States who opposed relocation, but also the migrants who refused to be identified in the hotspots and jeopardised the positive outcome of relocation (they become scapegoats): according to Stone (2002), stories of control are often characterised by a 'blame-the-victim' attitude, which is indeed reflected in this document. The moral of the story is that the EU/other member states need to step up their support for Italy, as it has fulfilled its duty to set up the hotspots and register incoming migrants.

A similar plot is deployed in Morcone's intervention in front of the Schengen Parliamentary Committee. He stresses that Member states have not respected the agreement on which the 2015 agenda was based: Italy had to register and fingerprint migrants to prevent their secondary movement, but in return states would have agreed to relocation. As reported in interview 3, this did not happen and the relocation was finally considered «definitely not a success, but a disappointment»: in this case a story of decline re-emerges, based on the idea that change was merely an illusion. Once again, Italy is portrayed as the victim of such plot and the Visegrad countries, as well as others such as France and Finland, as the villains.

Interestingly, in his 2016 speech, the Head of the Immigration Department rejected the most securitarian aspects of both the hotspot approach and the European agenda, as well as of some of his government discourses, stating that the *hotspots* should not and cannot become closed/detention centres, and that the return policy cannot be seen as a panacea. He claims that the moral of the story can only be a complex one, where return is part of the picture, but also fair asylum procedures, reception of asylum seekers and burden sharing have to be considered.

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[12] Interview n.3.

*f) Relationship between media and political narratives (communicative sphere)
and policy-making narratives (coordinative sphere)*

The policy documents we have analysed present a single and unanimous narrative, essentially the one put forward by the coalition government in 2015. All the characters are there: Italy as victim/hero; EU institutions as multifaceted, both good and bad; Member states as villains. The setting, for the reasons described above, spans the EU and national spheres and focuses mainly on the hotspot approach. The plot echoes the government narrative on the need to react to migration flows at both a national and European level, and advance a forward a story of control, in which the moral of the story is once again the importance of common policies and coordinated action in their implementation.

Depending on the actors, this core narrative is adapted by introducing additional elements: migrants as villains; EU agencies as partners; a moral of the story more focused on practical concerns related to the governance and implementation of control policies. The first element (contained in one out of three policy document) could be read as an indirect influence by the far-right parties' discourses which put the blame on (economic) migrants. The second and third elements focus, in quite a strong contrast with the political debate, on technical matters and on governance dynamics, rather than on simplistic and immediate solutions. The policy documents implicitly promote a narrative in which migration is a complex phenomenon that needs to be managed at several levels, including through the control of migrants' movements: compared to the focus of the communicative sphere (solidarity/lack of it), the attention is devoted to the combination of solidarity *and* responsibility measures. A technocratic language is combined with lay elements that reflect some opposition stances (migrants as scapegoats for the failure of relocation). However, in general most populist positions (such as the policy of 'closed' doors, naval blockade, and forced deportations at all costs) are implicitly rejected in the policy documents and were explicitly declared by the former Head of the Immigration Department in his interview as irresponsible and unrealistic: we can describe the policy actors attitude as a combination of adaptation and rejection of populist narratives. Nevertheless, the interviewee also acknowledged that «it was certainly a time when bad politics, I have to say very bad politics, made an extreme narrative» and «politics to some extent conditioned the technical decisions that were made. Because when a ministry gives you guidelines, you cannot deviate from them. You can try to soften them or apply them as flexibly as possible, but you certainly cannot break away from them»[13].

Overall, the language used in policy documents is more nuanced, balanced and technocratic, even if it is not entirely free of lay elements. Nonetheless, differences between these narratives and those dominating media and political communication are quite clear, especially insofar as migration is not merely presented as a threat (to Italians) but as a complex and articulated phenomenon to be managed.

g) Concluding remarks

Based on our analysis, we can conclude that the narratives on the specific event of relocation are never just about relocation itself, but resonate with more structural elements of the European migration agenda (open vs. closed borders policy) and with the broader issue of

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[13] Interview n. 3.

Member States' vs. European sovereignty. While the focus of media narratives is narrowly on relocation, in the political and policy domains relocation is often just an excuse to discuss the need for more solidarity, for a more structural Dublin reform, return policies and to debate national reception strategies. The salience of the issue of migration in the public debate is also reflected in the emergence of very lay and populist discourses in Parliament that refer to Italy and Italians as victims of uncontrolled migration. However, such narratives are not reflected in the media and can rarely be found in the coordinative sphere.

On the other hand, despite some specific elements of the story differing between the communicative and the coordinative sphere (i.e. the setting is narrower in the media, the villains can vary), there are at least two main aspects that can be found in all narratives across the three spheres and among the main actors of the political arena.

First, Italy is represented as the victim of the situation, in line with the master narrative on siege (see par. 2.1). Second, the overarching policy goal (more support from Europe and the implementation of return policies) are broadly bi-partisan, despite the differences that may still exist on more specific elements (characters, setting) and on the style (lay in the discourse of populist parties, a combination of rights-based and technocratic in the discourse of coalition MPs and in the policy domain). Another common feature of all narratives is that migrants themselves are almost completely absent.

When looking at which narratives circulate across the communicative and coordinative sphere, we may conclude that whilst populist narratives (characterised by framing migration as a threat to Italians and by the reference to gaining back control over it, through the exercise of sovereign powers) may influence the decision-making process[14], they are not taken up in the articles of the three newspapers we analysed nor in the narratives adopted by the policy sphere. Such narratives were silently ignored by centre-left politicians in the government and by policy making actors who were in charge of implementing migration policies in 2015, and were openly rejected in the interview we conducted in 2023[15]. Nonetheless, the policy documents incorporate the issues raised by the main politicians in the government and attempt to contextualise individual interventions within a broader and more complex conceptualisation of the phenomenon. Consequently, the most dominant narrative (even though with some adaptation, in the media, political and policy spheres) is built on a combination of humanitarian and securitarian elements and calls for the EU intervention in both the asylum/reception and the return domains.

3.2   Case study 2: The Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

a) Introduction to the case within the national context

Italy has been one of the main recipients of Ukrainian arrivals since the beginning of the war. Given the complex nature of the crisis, the media and politicians did not focus solely on refugee flows. Migration was thus not at the centre of media and political coverage. It was treated as part of a bigger picture related to the Russian invasion and the impact of the war on civilians. Overall, public attitudes towards Ukrainians fleeing the war were positive and supportive, with

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[14] Interview n.3. The same concept was expressed by a current member of Parliament (interview n. 1).
[15] Interview n. 3.

most of the population in favour of allowing many (36.4%) or at least some (42.1%) Ukrainians to enter the country (Dražanová and Geddes, 2022).

Like all EU countries, Italy implemented the Temporary Protection (TP) regime based on Directive 2001/55/EC and Council Decision 2022/382.By March 2023, 175,000 temporary protection permits had been issued and Italy ranked sixth among EU countries for temporary protection residents. The beneficiaries are Ukrainians and third-country nationals (TCN) registered as long-term residents in Ukraine (including refugees). Students and short-term TCN residents were not included.

The high number of TP beneficiaries had a significant impact on the reception system. A new political actor at the national level (the Civil Protection Department, coordinated by the Council of Ministry Office[16]) was given responsibility for implementing the new reception plan[17]. For the first time, family/community-based reception and accommodation were encouraged. An *ad hoc* economic support was issued to privately accommodate Ukrainians: only 20% of them were accommodated through the public reception system, while most (80%) applied for economic contribution (IDOS, 2022). In contrast to the current mainstream reception policy for asylum seekers, Ukrainians had immediate access to work, public health, education and integration measures such as the recognition of qualifications. In April 2023, all reception and integration measures for beneficiaries of temporary protection were renewed for a further period of 12 months.

b) Narratives in the media

The media analysis was conducted after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, between 25 February and 11 March 2022, on the three newspapers considered for the study. A total of twelve articles were analysed (four from *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and *Il Giornale* and five from *Il Corriere della Sera*). The salience of migration in the public debate in 2022 is much lower than it was between 2015 and 2018.

An alarmist narrative related to the exceptional nature of the refugee flow emerged in the very first articles of both the centre and right-wing newspapers (*Il Corriere* and *Il Giornale*). The articles described the refugee arrivals in emphatic terms, reporting daily figures and statistics and emphasising both the scale and the speed of the phenomenon. All newspapers adopted a humanitarian/victimising narrative: Ukrainian refugees were portrayed as victims. *Il Giornale* also described men who had to stay in Ukraine to fight and defend their country as heroes. Articles were often built around the personal dramatic stories of refugees; the protagonists of these stories were usually women and children.

In all three newspapers, the setting of the narratives spanned both domestic and European political spheres. There were a few recurring plots, the main ones being personal stories of Ukrainians fleeing their country, of volunteers and members of civil society helping them, and the discussion at the EU level on the activation of the temporary protection measure. Overall,

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[16] The Civil Protection Department is in charge of dealing with emergency situations (including both natural and man-made disasters or other forms of social and humanitarian emergency).

[17] According to a public servant at the Civil Protection Department, his Department was involved because of its readiness and logistic capacity to manage emergency situations and very high/uncertain numbers of displaced: the Civil Protection Department has experience in managing displaced people following earthquake or natural disasters. Interview n. 4.

there was a unanimous moral of the story: the need to offer help to Ukrainian refugees, including the duty of all European countries to open their borders.

In a context overall marked by strong homogeneity, narratives differed slightly on complementary elements. *Il Corriere* and *Il Giornale* both praised the EU and EU member states for deciding together to activate the Temporary Protection Directive and civil society actors (NGOs, but also private individuals, families, and parishes) for their immediate readiness to act and help the refugees. While this narrative is in line with the usual stance of *Il Corriere* as a centrist and generally pro-government newspaper, it was not to be taken for granted in the case of *Il Giornale*, given the newspaper's political orientation usually harbouring restrictionist views on migration.

A peculiar narrative, found only in *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, concerns the non-Ukrainians who lived in Ukraine and tried to flee the country as refugees. This humanitarian narrative stressed that these people were doubly victimised: as victims of the war and as victims of discrimination at the border with Poland. They were also treated differently in terms of EU policy.

Finally, alongside the editorial line, both *Il Corriere* and *Il Fatto* presented also the positions of some politicians: Matteo Salvini, leader of the right-wing populist party Lega; Giorgia Meloni, leader of the right-wing party Fratelli d'Italia; Mario Draghi, then Prime Minister, representing the position of the Italian government. Draghi's narrative highlighted the unity and solidarity of the EU and the role played by Italy. Salvini and Meloni victimised Ukrainian refugees (with a particular focus on children) and compared 'real refugees', i.e. Ukrainians fleeing a 'real' war (in particular 'Ukrainian orphans'), with 'false refugees' or 'economic migrants' arriving in Italy by boat. In their view, non-European asylum-seekers did not deserve the same protection that should be given to Ukrainians, because they are not escaping from 'real wars'. This narrative was explicitly criticised by *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. The articles on the positions of the main political actors followed the first major debate on the Ukrainian crisis, which took place in both chambers of Parliament on 1 March. Interestingly enough, such narratives were not taken up by the rightist newspaper (*Il Giornale*).

c) Narratives in political debate

Our analysis of the narratives in the political debate is based on three parliamentary debates concerning the consequences of the Ukrainian invasion. None of the debates was centred on migration and on the refugee flow as such. Most of the discussion focused more broadly on the war, its political and economic consequences and the military aid to be offered by Italy.

1) **Hearing of the Prime Minister** Mario Draghi on the urgent developments of the war between Russia and Ukraine and the parliamentary debate that took place on 1 March 2022 both in the Senate and in the Chamber of Deputies;

2) **Debate on the adoption of law 5 April 2022, n. 28,** converting Legislative Decree 28 February 2022, n. 14, which took place between 14 and 17 March 2022 in the Chamber of Deputies;

3) **Parliamentary question to the Ministry of the Interior** by a right-wing member of Parliament on 13 April 2022 on the functioning of the reception system.

The debate on 1 March was dominated by a narrative of unity between the parliamentary groups and unanimous condemnation of the Russian invasion. The issue of Ukrainian refugees was only briefly touched upon by the Prime Minister and some MPs. Addressing both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, Prime Minister Mario Draghi underlined Italy's role in supporting Ukraine recalling the solidarity the country has always shown in the face of humanitarian tragedies. His narrative was based on a humanitarian victim frame, in which Russia is the villain of the story, the Ukrainians fleeing the war are the victims; Italy (both the government and civil society actors) are the heroes. The Prime Minister presents some of the solutions proposed by the executive: the activation of special corridors for orphaned minors (particularly vulnerable victims) and innovative political solutions for the reception and accommodation of refugees.

MPs from one of the parties in the government coalition (*Movimento Cinque Stelle*) also emphasised the positive role of Italy and the importance of unity. They proposed the opening of humanitarian corridors into Europe, implicitly promoting the idea of free movement on EU territory. The countries of Eastern Europe are seen as heroes, because of the hundreds of thousands of refugees assisted, along with Italy and the Italians. The victims are Ukrainian refugees, but also Italian citizens who could suffer the economic consequences of the war (emergence of a populist plot). The interventions of a deputy of *Italia Viva* (centrist party) in the Senate insisted on the duty to support the Ukrainian refugees: the moral is that temporary protection should become a permanent solution (even if it is not specified whether this possibility could be extended to other categories of asylum seekers).

The intervention of two deputies from the far-right parties (*Fratelli d'Italia* in the Chamber and *Lega Nord* in the Senate) was based on different narratives. It should be noted that even though their discourses were very similar, the Northern League was a coalition party, while the Brothers of Italy was in opposition. The narrative focused on the juxtaposition between 'real refugees' (Ukrainian women and children, as the men stayed in their country to fight the war) and 'false refugees' (or 'economic migrants' coming to Italy by boat). In the words of Senator and party leader Matteo Salvini: «Italy will have its doors wide open for women and children who are real refugees fleeing a real war, quite different from other types of arrivals that war brings to Italy»[18]. The moral of the story is twofold: on the one hand, the recognition of protection status and assistance to Ukrainians; on the other hand, the implementation of the return of those coming through Libya and Tunisia. The humanitarian narrative is tightly intertwined with the recurrent narrative of security and border control. The opposition MP Giorgia Meloni (*Fratelli d'Italia*) also praised Eastern member states for their support of the refugees (heroes) and criticised the EU for its hypocrisy towards them. The Ukrainian crisis thus becomes an opportunity to invoke a narrative of sovereignty and Euroscepticism.

During the debate on the adoption of the law aimed at transforming Decree-Law No. 14/2022 (on economic and political measures related to the war), the main elements of the story resurfaced: the main villain was Russia, the Ukrainian refugees (with special mention of women and children) were the victims, Europe, acting in solidarity was the hero. The focus of the narrative partly shifted from the European to the national setting, and from praising the Italian government to praising humanitarian organisations, volunteers and civil society associations

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[18] Hearing of the Prime Minister Mario Draghi in front of the Senate and subsequent debate, Sen. Matteo Salvini, p. 50.

as the ones who provided the real support, including in the reception and integration process. Several MPs from the government coalition stressed the need for a comprehensive reception plan that goes beyond emergency measures.

The issue of the reception system was also raised by a MP from the far-right *Fratelli d'Italia* during a question-and-answer session in April 2022, in which a comparison was made between the resources available for the reception of asylum seekers (from Syria, Sudan, Egypt, Somalia and Niger) arriving by boat (villains) and those for the reception of Ukrainians (heroes), recalling the idea of those perceived as economic migrants as a welfare threat. The moral of the story, narrated by a far-right MP, was that funds should only be reallocated to the 'real' Ukrainian refugees and the arrival of economic migrants should be stopped. The narrative contrasting 'real' and 'fake' refugees was somehow adapted in the intervention of an MP of a left-wing opposition group (ManifestA, group of 4 parliamentarians who left the Five Star Movement), according to which the Ukrainian crisis exposed the juxtaposition between first and second-class refugees.

d) Analysis of the relationship between media narratives and political narratives

In both the media and the political debate, the language of the dominant narratives is lay: dramatic and vivid scenes are evoked, personal stories are mixed with sensational messages, victimising the Ukrainians and praising the European 'rescuers'. The tone is emotional and the main aim of the narrators (both newspapers and parliamentarians) is to evoke empathy.

The main narrative - which occupies most of the space in both the newspapers and the parliamentary debate - resonates with the master narrative of humanitarianism. It portrays the Ukrainian refugees as victims and Russia as the villain. Women and children are specifically mentioned to emphasise their vulnerability and need for help, but also, implicitly, their harmlessness to Italians. Within this main narrative, there is no space for non-Ukrainians fleeing the war: the most common terms are 'Ukrainian refugees' ('profughi ucraini'). According to this narrative, the plot is simple, the setting is that of the crisis, and an urge to act pervades the discourses; the heroes are Europe/the Europeans and Italy/Italians. While the moral is always the same (the provision of legal protection and material reception), the arguments on which it is based are more structured and complex in the case of the parliamentary debates: the solutions are more concrete and specific measures are proposed. This main narrative is presented with the same structural elements both in the media and in the political sphere, with specific reference to the first parliamentary debate of 1 March 2022, resulting in a case of perfect alignment.

Such narrative was mobilised in the discourses of MPs belonging to the majority coalition, especially in the debate over the adoption of the law (doc. 2), in order to reaffirm the policy choices of the coalition government. While the plot and some of the characters remain the same, the setting is more complex and focuses mainly on policies to be implemented in the national context. New morals emerged in the parliamentary sphere, such as the need to implement long-term and structured reception plans and the importance of discussing solidarity within a wider debate that takes into account a reform of Dublin. A parallelism can be drawn on this aspect with the first case on relocation: in both cases, the MPs of the government deployed a (dominant) narrative, which can be found also in the media, to vindicate a policy choice: they strategically adapted a dominant narrative to reinforce their political stances.

A pattern of adaptation of the prevalent 'pure' humanitarian narrative can be found in the narrative of 'real' and 'fake' refugees, based on the matching of humanitarianism and securitarianism[19]. Although this narrative is less dominant, its main elements (Ukrainian women and children as victims; male migrants from other countries as villains; Italy and Italians as heroes; recognition of legal status and reception for Ukrainians, as opposed to deportation for the other migrants, as policy solutions) can be found both in the media (*Il Fatto Quotidiano* and *Il Corriere della Sera*) and in parliamentary debates. Given that the articles were published after the parliamentary debate on 1 March, it can be concluded that the narrative was first communicated in the political debate and then taken up by the media, with both *Il Corriere* and *Il Fatto* criticising it. Interestingly, the right-wing populist newspaper (*Il Giornale*) decided to ignore it. The same narrative was then repeated in the parliamentary debates in April 2022 by other members of the 'Brothers of Italy'. Political discourse influenced the media and was subsequently reproduced in the political context, along a cycle structure.

Finally, a minoritarian narrative, which only appeared in one out of thirteen media articles and which concerned the situation of non-Ukrainian migrants fleeing the war, was never taken up in the political debate, resulting in a case of ignoring.

As for the style of narratives, we found that they become more technocratic as time went on: from a very urgent and crisis-oriented debate on the 1st of March, MPs interventions on the policy of reception of Ukrainians became more abstracted and oriented towards broad policy solutions. The main difference is once again found in far-right discourses that advanced a lay narrative on the distinction between Ukrainians and 'other asylum seekers', which is only based on a simplistic and 'morally' catching separation between victims and villains.

e) Narratives in policy-making documents

We have selected three policy documents that either explain or implement the reception and integration policy for Ukrainians and, in particular, for beneficiaries of temporary protection.

- **Hearing of the Ministry of Interior**, Luciana Lamorgese, in front of the Parliamentary committee for monitoring the implementation of the Schengen agreement, 30/03/2022;

- **National Plan for the Assistance and Reception of People Fleeing the War in Ukraine**, Ministry of the Interior, adopted in 13/04/2022;

- **Explanatory Comment on the Law Decree L. 16/2023** on temporary protection measures on Ukrainian refugees drafted by the Study Service of the Chamber of Deputies.

The first document is intended for the government to present, defend and justify its policies on migration in front of an audience composed of MPs and expert on the issue: this is thus the richest and most interesting one, while the other documents are intended for civil servants working in the Civil Protection Department, who are no experts of migration laws and policies but rather of the implementation of immediate policy responses to emergencies. The content

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[19] According to a current member of Parliament, the far-right parties used this narrative to reinforce, even in a context of lack of relevance of the migration issue in the political debate, their anti-immigration and xenophobic positions, while at the same time reinforcing an idea of unity among 'white and blond' Europeans. Interview n. 1.

of the second and third documents does not refer to the broader geopolitical context, but is mainly based on very practical guidelines on how to implement Ukrainians reception.

In the first document, the Ministry of the Interior intervenes on the implementation of the newly planned reception measures. The action relates to the outbreak of war and its enormous impact on the lives of both Ukrainians and European citizens and refers to the solutions immediately put in place by Europe, revealing a strong pro-EU stance. The setting is indeed that of European politics, emphasising the role of solidarity and unity of member states in the crisis. The Ministry of the Interior also stressed the importance of balancing responsibility and solidarity, seemingly using the Ukrainian case to recall the application of such principles in the wider migration context. The narrative thus aims to capture the complexity of the bigger picture: the Ukrainian case was «yet another demonstration of the complexity of the migration issue, which is constantly changing and articulated in many facets that need to be considered together»[20]. At the same time, the Ministry expressed the hope that the policy solutions implemented for the Ukrainian crisis could be extended to the general migration scenario, as «the crisis in Eastern Europe is not the only source of instability we face. In view of the crises in other geopolitical quadrants, new flows will undoubtedly continue to arrive, putting pressure on Europe's external borders»[21].

As far as the main characters are concerned, we have the same protagonists: Russia as the villain, the Ukrainians as the victims and the European and national institutions as the main heroes. The moral of the story reaches both the EU and national levels: the most important step was the activation of the temporary protection scheme, while at the national level a whole series of initiatives for the management of reception were activated. Children were explicitly mentioned as one of the groups targeted by specific protection measures.

In terms of moral/political solutions in the long term and beyond the Ukrainian crisis, the Ministry stressed the importance of comprehensive migration governance at EU level, which builds on a story of control: migration flows must be managed and controlled even beyond the Ukrainian crisis, and this must be achieved through a reform of both the Dublin and Schengen regulations. The focus of the narrative quickly shifted from a - limited - humanitarian one to a - broader – geopolitical and securitarian one, based on border controls and the control of human mobility.

The second policy document we analysed is the National Plan for the Assistance and Reception of People Fleeing the War in Ukraine, adopted by the Civil Protection Department on 13 April 2022. The framing of the narratives spans both the European and national spheres, with a particular focus on the technical and executive levels. Specific reference is made to the role of the civil protection services of the EU and other Member States. The narrative emphasises the emergency and exceptional nature of the situation, the struggles and suffering of the Ukrainians, and the massive humanitarian assistance needed and provided by European governments. Russia is once again the villain, those fleeing the war are the victims: the plan refers not only to Ukrainians but to refugees and displaced persons in general ('profughi', 'sfollati').

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[20] Hearing of the Ministry of Interior, p. 37.
[21] Hearing of the Ministry of Interior, p. 6.

After a general overview of the situation, the Plan then focuses on reception policies, stressing the importance of coordination between the various levels of government. Although the initial setting is vivid and urgent, and the language of the preamble is emotional and dramatic, the following section presents a more technical and structured policy solution: a new national approach to the assistance and reception of refugees.

The third policy document is noteworthy because it refers to a legislative decree adopted by a different Government (led by the far-right party Fratelli d'Italia). Despite the government change, all elements of the dominant narratives are maintained and reproduced: Ukrainians remain the victims; the Italian government keeps featuring as the hero; the extension of the community reception policy and the increase of the Asylum National Fund is presented as the moral of the story. The importance of tailored policies for unaccompanied minors is also stressed. Even though the war and initial refugee inflow can be traced back one year, the situation is still framed in emergency terms.

f) Relationship between media and political narratives (communicative sphere) and policy-making narratives (coordinative sphere)

The main humanitarian/victim-based narrative about Ukrainians is adopted in all policy documents, regardless of which government was in power at the time the policy was adopted. According to an official working at the Civil Protection Department, the policy response was influenced by the way the crisis was framed in the public sphere (mainly by the media). The emotional tone of the narrative was dominant also during the coordinative meetings between the Civil Protection Department and civil society representatives[22].

However, it is interesting to note that already on 30 March, while the media and the political debate focused only on the situation in Ukraine, the Ministry of the Interior broadened the scope of the narrative to include references to a more structural need for solidarity among EU states, not just on the Ukrainian crisis. Such an adaptation (regarding the moral of the story) to the 'emergency-based' narrative (mostly present in the media) was taken up by the coalition party in the April parliamentary debate. We have thus witnessed a particular case of circulation between the political and policy spheres, with a more technocratic approach to the mainstream narrative partly reflected in the parliamentary debates. This demonstrates the performative power of a technocratic narrative deployed at policy production level. As in the first case we analysed (the Relocation plan), narratives in the coordinative spheres are based on more complex plots, in which the causes of migration are multifaceted and thus pushing towards more comprehensive and articulated policy solutions.

Nevertheless, of the three policy documents analysed, the Interion Ministry consultation is the only one in which a more detailed, less empathetic and overall more complex narrative emerged. In the other two documents, whose content is highly technical, the language used to frame the narrative remains focused on the emergency and emergency-driven solutions, on the specificity of the crisis, and on a simplistic plot according to which Ukrainians are victims and need to be protected/assisted. This is probably due to the institutional actor that adopted the documents, as the Civil Protection Department is generally in charge of the management of humanitarian emergencies and its audience is mainly composed of officers of the Civil

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[22] Interview n. 4.

Protection on the ground, who are very used to a simplistic, vivid and dramatic style. The targeted audience thus imply that, despite the technical content of the documents, the style of the narrative consists in a mix of lay and technocratic elements.

Finally, it should be noted that the minoritarian narrative, which combines humanitarian and securitarian elements (by contrasting 'real' Ukrainian refugees with 'false' African and Middle Eastern migrants), does not appear in any of the policy documents we analysed, resulting in a case of a narrative that is completely ignored by the coordinative sphere.

g) Concluding remarks

The Ukrainian case appears peculiar from different points of view. Migration was not a salient topic in the public debate, and it did not polarise the political arena. Even the debate on the reception policies – which have always been a mediatic and political 'battlefield' (see par. 2.1) – did not give rise to conflicting narratives. On the contrary, the common acknowledgment of the need of an emergency response led to the circulation of a bipartisan, humanitarian narrative, including on the implementation of reception measures and no reference to (Ukrainians) refugees as an economic threat was ever embedded in the narratives.

The humanitarian narrative – which is combined with a process of victimisation of refugees – is bipartisan and it is dominant (mainly adopted, or only slightly adapted by) in all spheres. This narrative is quite unique in the migration framework, as it resonates *only* with the humanitarian master narrative and does not include references to migrants as a threat/risk, nor does it follow the rhetoric of siege. The only element it has in common with the securitarian master narratives is that the flow of refugees is an unexpected and extraordinary phenomenon - a fact that cannot be denied - that needs to be dealt with by emergency measures. However, the emergency in this case is not migration *per se*, but it is identified in the war: the refugee inflow is the unavoidable consequence of a broader emergency.

Compared to the other cases, this is the only one in which migrants are always one of the main characters of the story, and along this narrative, a stereotypical idea of femininity is reproduced, in which migrant women (together with children) are represented as 'victims' or 'vulnerable'. However, it is only in the populist narratives that women are pitted against men (seen as a 'burden' or a 'threat'), and these narratives remain minoritarian in the debate (i.e. MPs' statements are not taken up by the right-wing newspaper and are criticised by the other two). The last example also illustrates the two-way/circular relationship between the media and the political sphere. The discourses of MPs from the far-right parties are nonetheless interesting as they 'used' Ukrainian refugees in order to reinforce and legitimise their security and populist approach towards 'ordinary' migration flows, drawing on the main narrative which distinguishes between economic migrants (threat) from (real) refugees.

Finally, it is worth reiterating that political and policy narratives are not a mere reflection, but rather an adaptation of the vivid humanitarian narrative that can be found in the media: particularly in the policy-making domain, the plot is broader than the Ukrainian refugee flow, and the narrative is justified to mobilise broader policy goals: this suggests a more technocratic style.

3.3   Case study 3: SAR operations and the criminalisation of NGOs

a) Introduction to the case within the national context

In the aftermath of the refugee crisis, given the limited effectiveness of the EU SAR operations (Triton, Sophia) that replaced Italy's Mare Nostrum operation, several NGOs mobilised to contribute directly to the rescue of migrants at sea. In December 2016, the Financial Times published confidential Frontex information on possible links between NGOs involved in SAR operations and smugglers. On 17 February 2017, the prosecutor of Catania, Carmelo Zuccaro, opened an investigation into NGOs accused of smuggling. His statements fuelled suspicion and mistrust towards NGOs. More investigations were opened, and a narrative criminalising NGOs spread in the country and in the media. As early as April 2017, a top representative of the anti-establishment Movimento 5 Stelle party stigmatised NGOs, referring to them as 'sea taxis'.

The government was thus called upon by the Parliament to establish 'clear rules' for NGOs involved in SAR operations. In July 2017, Interior Minister Minniti presented a code of conduct that all NGOs willing to participate in SAR operations in cooperation with the Italian authorities had to sign. However, the policy of criminalising NGOs did not stop in 2017, despite a significant decrease in the number of migrants crossing from Libya following the Memorandum of Understanding signed in February 2017.

On the contrary, this policy trend was reinforced by Interior Minister Matteo Salvini under the subsequent coalition between the Lega and the Five Stars Movement. Salvini implemented a (*de facto*) policy of 'closed ports', refusing to authorise the disembarkation of NGO ships with migrants on board. In 2019, the government passed a decree law that institutionalised this policy and imposed very high fines on NGOs that violated the orders. The most critical provisions of the decree were modified in 2020, at a time when NGO criminalisation had been eased and most criminal cases had been dismissed (Cusumano and Villa, 2020). Finally, in late 2022, the new far-right government once again fuelled criminalisation discourses. A shift in policy was also observed at the level of the Coast Guard's approach to NGOs[23] and a new decree law was passed in January 2023 hampering NGO activities.

b) Narratives in the media

The analysis is based on twelve articles (four for each newspaper) published between 29 June and 15 July 2017, a few weeks before the adoption of the Code of Conduct on NGOs. The narrative in all the media is centred on the idea of very high migratory pressure and of an 'invasion' of the country: the salience of migration in the public debate was particularly high in that period, similar only to the peak reached in the summer 2015. Apart from this common element, the narratives in the three newspapers are very fragmented and full of ambiguity even within the same newspaper.

There are two main narratives in *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. The first is based on a rejection of the criminalisation of NGOs. It is set in both the EU and national political spheres. NGOs are simultaneously presented as victims of the Italian government's decision to close ports (to

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[23] Interview with a former Member of Parliament (2013-2018 legislature). Interview n. 2.

NGOs' foreign-flagged ships) and as heroes for carrying out rescues in a void of protection. The Italian government is portrayed as the main villain for wanting to close ports, a solution considered inhumane and unrealistic, and to limit NGOs presence in the sea. The EU and other Member States were also portrayed as villains for refusing to share responsibility for migrants rescued by NGOs and disembarked in Italy: such narrative recalls the idea of Italy left to carry the burden of migration policies, that was already dominant in the case study 1. The moral of the story is the development of a functioning EU SAR system. According to the second narrative (contained in an editorial of *Il Fatto Quotidiano*), the roles of the main characters are partially reversed. NGOs become villains, accused of controversial behaviour in their activities at sea. Public Prosecutor Zuccaro is the hero of the story because he revealed possible complicity with smugglers. This narrative did not criticise the Italian government for closing Italian ports to NGO ships or for adopting a code of conduct for NGOs: these were described as good initiatives, just as in *Il Corriere* and *Il Giornale*. As *Il Fatto Quotidiano* was presented as the most progressive newspaper of the three selected, such a narrative unveils the contradictions of both the media and the political debate. This turn can be explained by taking into account that the newspaper is the closest to the positions of the anti-establishment party 'Movimento Cinque Stelle', which criticised the NGOs and praised the work of Zuccaro.

The main narrative of *Il Corriere della Sera* is based on praising the Italian government for its strong position on NGOs: both the decisions to close ports to foreign-flagged NGO ships, and to adopt the code of conduct were considered inevitable and courageous and are situated in a story of gaining control on immigration. The newspaper stressed that this solution was fully justified by the «real risk of an invasion that would be impossible to control»[24]. According to this narrative, which echoes the master narrative of Italy besieged by migrant arrivals, the Italian government was the hero and the EU and other Member States were the villains due to their lack of cooperation in the management and reception of the rescued migrants. The setting of the narratives covered both domestic and European politics, focusing in particular on the Italian government's position vis-à-vis the EU and EU Member States on the management of arrivals at sea: once again, some elements of the narratives we found in case 1 surface in this case study. The most interesting aspect of the narrative is the ambiguous role of NGOs: they are described both as heroes for saving the lives of migrants and as villains for the controversial behaviours/procedures they put in place. However, the moral is that their activities can be useful in saving migrants' lives, but on the other hand, they need to be guided and properly regulated (e.g. by the Code of Conduct). In this position we identified a combination of securitarian and humanitarian features, in line with the master narrative that we identified as the dominant one between 2013 and 2015 (see par. 2.1).

Similarly, to what was described for Il *Corriere della Sera*, a recurring narrative in *Il Giornale* during the period analysed was one that praised the Italian government for finally adopting a more resolute position on the issue of NGOs. This narrative highlighted in particular the role of the Minister of the Interior, Marco Minniti. Despite being a member of a centre-left government, he was openly praised by a right-wing newspaper like *Il Giornale*. Like *Il Corriere*, *Il Giornale* criticised the Member States for their lack of solidarity and cooperation with Italy. The newspaper's narrative differed from *Il Corriere*'s in the way the NGOs were portrayed: there was no mention of their role in saving lives, and they were unequivocally criticised for being a pull factor; for contributing to the increase in arrivals; for jeopardising Italian and European

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[24] F. Sarzanini, "Fermezza inevitabile", *Corriere della Sera*, 29/06/2017, p.26.

migration policies; and for rejecting any form of regulation. The newspaper also recalled that in recent months judicial investigations had raised the suspicion that the activities of NGOs favoured smugglers. An element which is common to *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (but not with *Il Corriere*) is the description of Public Prosecutor Zuccaro as a hero. He was praised for his investigations and for opening up a debate at the political level on the role of NGOs in the Mediterranean.

c) Narratives in political debate

The analysis of the narratives in the political debate is based on three parliamentary debates, which took place in the Deputies Chamber, concerning:

1) **Assembly discussion subsequent to a motion promoted by centre-left MPs** on the issue of identification of dead migrants in the Mediterranean (9 May 2017);

2) **Question time to the Ministry of Interior** on the management of migration flows and subsequent discussion (5 July 2017);

3) **Parliamentary hearing of the Minister of Interior** on the NGO Code of conduct (19 July 2017).

The setting of the first debate is the Mediterranean Sea and the continuous shipwrecks that take place in the limb of sea between Italy and Libya, which question both domestic and European policies. Political discourses are very polarised between different positions on the role of NGOs.

A member of a small centre-left party (*Scelta Civica*) who sponsored the discussion adopted a human rights-based approach to both the importance of identifying the victims and the need to save the migrants. Following this humanitarian narrative, she proposed the creation of humanitarian corridors, but at the same time advocated investing in anti-smuggling policies. While the migrants are clearly the victims and the smugglers clearly the villains, her attitude towards NGOs is quite ambiguous. They are accepted as heroes for saving lives, but also as controversial actors whose actions need to be clarified.

The humanitarian narrative - in which migrants are victims - is common to the discourse of Erasmo Palazzotto, a member of the left-wing party *Sinistrà e Libertà*. However, he unambiguously described the NGOs as heroes because they make up for the lack of a proper Italian and European rescue policy. The role of the NGOs is placed in a broader context in which the externalisation policy is strongly criticised. This is the only narrative that does not present migration as an emergency. Palazzotto maintained the same positions in the second debate (5 July), in which he also stressed the failure of EU policies, the lack of solidarity between member states and denounced the «capitulation of the government and the democratic party to the rampant culture of a xenophobic right»[25].

The position of the members of Berlusconi's right-wing party (*Forza Italia*) and of the right-wing party (*Fratelli d'Italia*) is quite the opposite. Their narrative touches briefly on a humanitarian frame, according to which the migrants who died in the Mediterranean are the main victims

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[25] Question time to the Ministry of Interior on the management of migration flows, Erasmo Palazzotto, p. 71.

and the smugglers the main villains. However, they also point to NGOs as villains because their activities stimulate and fuel smugglers' networks (Rampelli, from *Fratelli d'Italia,* explicitly refers to Zuccaro's investigation on this point). The moral of the story is based on the need to prevent the departure of migrants from Libya, and it is based on a story of control (rather than on one of decline), even if the concrete details put forward by each party differ: according to Altieri (*Forza Italia*) the solution is to cooperate with Libya, while for Rampelli (*Fratelli d'Italia*) a naval blockade of the Libyan coast should be implemented.

While the specific focus of the discussion are NGOs, the debate is clearly based on the master narrative of criminalisation of migration and of actors acting in solidarity with migrants. We found that some actors in the political arena refuse the criminalisation discourse, but most of MPs interventions are embedded in security-driven solutions, aside with humanitarian considerations.

During the second debate, held in July, the Ministry of Interior, a member of the centre-left coalition party *Partito Democratico*, refused to directly address the issue of praising or criticising NGOs. His narrative is set in the broader context of the management of migration flows in the Mediterranean and the need to coordinate the rescue operations of the Italian coastguard, NGOs and the Libyan coastguard. The main hero of this narrative is the Italian government, which has played a central role in establishing cooperation with Libyan authorities, including on rescue operations. Security-driven policies (such as externalisation) are justified by recalling humanitarian needs (to save lives). Once again, the 'flip-flop' of security and humanitarian narratives dominates the scene. Minniti also stressed the government's ability to reach an agreement with France and Germany on greater solidarity: the narratives of the Ministry of Interior on NGOs serve the scope of vindicating broader government policies and to present those policies are supported by a vast consensus. The Code of conduct is presented as an instrument implemented by the government following the recommendations of the Senate's Defence Commission[26], unanimously approved by all political forces. For Minniti, the overall moral of the story is the stabilisation of Libya, since it could have significant consequences both in terms of migration management and security (he refers to the Islamic threat coming from the Sahel).

In the third debate we examined, the question time on the content of the code of conduct, the Ministry of the Interior reiterated that the Code of conduct was not a spontaneous initiative of the government, but was based on parliamentary activity. It added that the Code was in line with international human rights obligations and stressed the need to balance humanitarian and security concerns[27].

The securitarian narrative, embedded in a technocratic style, adopted by the Ministry was countered in both the second and third debates by alarming populist narratives from the far-right opposition parties, which can be identified as stories of decline and echo the master

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[26] Defence Commission (Senate of the Republic), Investigation into the contribution of the Italian military to the control of migration flows in the Mediterranean and the impact of the activities of non-governmental organisations, Doc. XVII n. 9, Session No. 238 of 23 May 2017.
[27] «There is therefore a strong interest, with a view to balancing humanitarian and humanitarian profiles with those relating to the national security of our country, that such activities take place in well-defined and defined and regulated areas and without jeopardising the effectiveness of operations carried out by public authorities in compliance with precise behavioural coordinates», Parliamentary hearing of the Minister of Interior on the NGO Code of conduct, pag. 53.

narratives based on migration as an emergency and on the metaphor of siege. Molteni (*Lega Nord*) narrated a plot of a 'planned mass invasion' of migrants that was about to break Italy[28]. The picture is a simplistic one with very few main characters: the Italian government and the EU are treated as villains for not being able to control the borders; Italians are the real victims of the invasion. There is no reference to NGOs in his intervention. The same elements and the same populist rhetoric are reflected in the intervention of Meloni (*Fratelli d'Italia*), who also portrays economic migrants (framed as '*clandestini'*) as villains and, thus, as a security and economic threat.

d) Analysis of the relationship between media narratives and political narratives

Overall, there are always some components of the narratives deployed in the media that are taken up in the political debate. The cases of adaptation are far more than those of mere embracing: political narratives present often include some additional elements (concerning the setting or the characters of the story) if compared to media ones.

For example, if we consider the main narrative of the right-wing newspaper, which is based on a plot in which the Italian government, abandoned by the EU and other member states, rightly adopted severe measures against the villainous NGOs (described as a pull factor), we see that such a narrative is only partially mirrored in the discourse of right-wing (*Forza Italia*) or far-right (*Lega Nord*, *Fratelli d'Italia*) leaders. Even if they have the same position on the role of NGOs, the politicians' narratives are injected with an additional populist and anti-government rhetoric. Their positions are much more polarised: the government becomes the villain of the story (no hero can be found) and its policies are criticised for not being tough enough. We can therefore see this as a case of adaptation, which can be explained as a consequence of a partial dis-alignment of the right-oriented newspaper we selected from the position of far-right politicians, in the landscape of a journalism that sees as many as three newspapers aligned with the spectrum of rightist positions (in addition to Il Giornale, there are also 'La Verità' and 'Libero').

Another case of adaptation can be seen in the discourses of centre-left politicians. The narrative of Santerini (Scelta Civica) is similar to that of *Il Corriere della Sera*, in which NGOs are at once positive and shady characters, but her narrative is embedded in a more humanitarian/human rights-based tone and she proposes an additional political solution compared to the one present in the media narrative. The same can be said of the narrative of the Ministry of the Interior, which is more focused on a technocratic/securitarian approach: the setting of the narrative is broader, the plot is more complex, the moral takes into account additional elements (cooperation with Libya, agreement with other Member States) than the behaviour of NGOs.

A case of embracing can be found in the circulation of the minoritarian narrative, according to which the NGOs are the heroes, the Italian government is the villain for wanting to restrict their presence, and the EU and the member states are to blame for giving up on developing a more humane migration policy. The main elements of this narrative are present in some articles in *Il Fatto Quotidian*o, as well as in the speeches of the left-wing party *Sinistra e Libertà.*

Finally, we found some examples of 'ignoring' the 'negative narrative' about NGOs in the discourses of far-right politicians during the debate on 5 July. They prefer to ignore the policy

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[28] Question time to the Ministry of Interior on the management of migration flows, Nicola Molteni, p. 70.

of regulating the presence of NGOs and the announced closure of ports to foreign-flagged ships (praised by *Il Giornale*) in order to advance the master narrative of a 'planned invasion' and 'siege', accusing the government of endangering the safety of Italians and using typical sovereignist references to radical border closure, according to a plot of (re-gained) control.

The relationship between the two spheres is very bidirectional, or it can be described as a «circular symbiotic relationship, in which it seems to emerge that the media and politics exploit social unease to project it onto the public sphere»[29]. In the majority of cases we witnessed a circulation of narratives resulting in the similarities between political and media discourses, with additional elements of either complexity or populism in the political debate. This might be due to the fact that - according to one of the interviewees - public media tend to reproduce politicians' statements according to a criterion of 'fair representation' of all parties, adopting in their article the same content of the press releases of political parties, without critically assessing them[30].

Overall, the language used by both the media and politicians is lay and is embedded in rhetorical figures (NGOs as pull factors; emergency; invasion). The tone and language of the three newspapers is quite similar, and in particular *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and *Il Giornale* frequently use expressions such as 'pull factors', 'invasion', 'emergency, 'sea taxis' (either to criticise or defend NGOs/attack the government). On the other hand, there is a difference in the language of political debate: while left and centre-left politicians (including those in the government coalition) adopt a more balanced tone, base their statements on complex analyses and refuse to frame migration in terms of an emergency, those from populist parties (*Lega Nord*, *Fratelli d'Italia* and *Movimento 5 Stelle*) do exactly the opposite, using the same moralising language as the media and calling for unrealistic and short-term solutions that do not take account of the complexity of the situation.

e) *Narratives in policy-making documents*

We decided to select the policy documents taking into account the process, already underlined above, according to which the narrative that criminalises NGOs was not created by either the media or the politicians but should be traced back to judiciary investigations in 2017. In order to fully understand the complex dynamics and circulation of narratives between the communicative and coordinative spheres, we thus decided to take into account a policy document (namely a parliamentary hearing) in which a prosecutor was heard as an expert. While the role of the Judiciary in shaping narratives was not part of the focus of our analysis, we nonetheless considered it necessary to include the voice of this 'technical' actor in shaping the 'coordinative narratives' because of the central role Public Prosecutors played in the criminalisation of NGOs[31]. For this reason, we selected one policy document that anticipates both the media production and the parliamentary debates.

The three policy documents reflect respectively the narratives that permeated the actions of Public Prosecutor Zuccaro; the adoption of the Code of Conduct for NGOs; the policies of the Naval Coast Guard:

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[29] Interview n.2.
[30] Interview n. 2.
[31] Interview n.2.

- **Hearing of the Public Prosecutor Carmelo Zuccaro** in front of the Parliamentary Committee of Deputy Chambers that inquire on the reception, identification and expulsion system, 6th May 2017. The document is inteded for an audience of MPs carrying out an ad hoc inquiry;

- **Code of Conduct for NGO**s involved in rescue operations of migrants at sea, adopted by the Ministry of Interior (as a soft law document), 31st July 2017: the Code is a technical and administrative document targeting directly NGOs;

- **Report on the Search and Rescue (SAR) activities in the Central Mediterranean** published by the General Command of the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center Rome in January 2018. The targeted audience of the document can be identified in both the Coast Guards officers and the government.

In the first document, the narrative on NGOs is framed within the broader setting of criminalisation of illegal trafficking and of human smuggling, which is the primary focus of judiciary and investigation activities. A first narrative plot establishes a clear link between NGO presence in the Mediterranean Sea and the challenges in identifying smugglers. According to the Public Prosecutor, if NGOs had not operated rescue operations so close to Libya, it would have been easier for the Italian police to identify smugglers (who would have been forced to convoy migrants' ships closer to Italian ports). According to this narrative, NGOs are villains because they hamper the investigation by the police/judiciary (the heroes) and their activity has to be better regulated. However, the Public Prosecutor refers to an evergreen narrative (which we also found in the 2015 case study, and that resurfaced in the 2022 case) based on the distinction between 'real' refugees and 'economic migrants': when NGOs intervene to rescue the latter category, they can be considered as facilitating smugglers and thus they *become* criminals and have to be prosecuted[32]. Such a narrative adopts moralising language and it openly identifies NGOs as criminals.

In the other two documents we analyse there is no trace of a direct criminalisation narrative. However, the Code of Conduct requires NGOs not to enter into Libyan territorial waters and it is built on the first narrative introduced by Zuccaro in May 2017, according to which NGOs presence has to be regulated and coordinated with Italian authorities. In this narrative, NGOs are presented as both heroes (they can be authorities' allies in saving lives) and as enemies (if they fail to sign the Code; in this case they'll be liable to state actions). The need to regulate NGOs activity is placed within a setting of both national and European policy on migration management: according to the Ministry of Interior (which adopted the Code) search and rescue activities have to be coordinated with reception and relocation at the EU level.

Finally, in the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) report the narrative on the role of NGOs is placed within a humanitarian rhetoric that praises first of all the Italian Coast Guard and subsequently NGOs for saving migrants lives. The Code of Conduct is presented as a necessary document to «face the complexity of rescue operations and to safeguards migrants

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[32] «Where, on the other hand, action is only taken to come to the aid of people who are in conditions of economic or exploitation, but are not in a dangerous situation, one can situations, one can discuss whether it is useful or not to useful to do rescue work [...] If I cross the border of Libyan waters because I want to save someone who is economically unwell in the country of origin and without there being an objective situation of distress, I objectively facilitate the traffickers», Hearing of Carmelo Zuccaro, Doc. 1, p. 16.

safety»[33]. Both the role of MRCC and the governmental policy on NGOs are upheld as necessary and brave actions.

f) Relationship between media and political narratives (communicative sphere) and policy-making narratives (coordinative sphere)

As anticipated, one peculiarity of the analysis of the policy/coordinative sphere was the inclusion of a document reflecting the narrative of the Judiciary, in order to reveal the crucial role of Public Prosecutors Zuccaro in shaping one (if not two) of the dominant narratives in the NGOs criminalisation. It is possible to trace back many of the main narrative elements in the communicative sphere to the discourse of the Prosecutor: ultimately the Prosecutor's approach is grounded on a criminalisation narrative that conceives criminal law as a tool to manage migration flows.

We can imply that the most dominant narratives in the media/political sphere, according to which NGOs are 'the villains' because they facilitate (or collude with) smugglers, or at least because their activities are a pull factor for migration, has been originally crafted outside the media and political spheres and can be traced back to the leak of internal Frontex documents in 2016 and Zuccaro's investigation in February 2016.

Peculiar to this case is the alignment of media and political narratives which took up elements of the Public Prosecutor's speech. This was possible because his speech - although based on a judicial prosecution - presented a lay, moralistic and simplistic tone (i.e. true refugees opposed to economic migrants; direct causal link between NGOs presence and smugglers): such finding contrasts with the expectation that judicial discourses are characterised by technocratic considerations and a technocratic style.

It should be noted that Zuccaro's intervention was embedded in what were later constructed as two different narratives: on the one hand NGOs as an actor (simultaneously hero and villain) to be regulated and coordinated by the Italian authorities; on the other, NGOs as criminals, that facilitated the arrivals of (mostly economic) migrants. This latter narrative echoes the idea of migrants as a security and economic threat, which shall be prevented using a security-driven apparatus (including criminal law). The first narrative was dominant in the centrist newspaper, mirrored in the coalition parties' discourse and reflected in the adoption of the Code of Conduct as well as in the MRCC report. The second one fuelled both the narrative in *Il Giornale* and in one article by *Il Fatto Quotidiano,* which was then adapted in the narratives of right and far-right parties, but also in the intervention of MPs from Movimento Cinque Stelle.

In the Executive's policy narratives, however, there is no mention of such a criminalising narrative (resulting in a case of ignoring). On the contrary, the Code of Conduct seemed to a certain extent influenced by the 'siege' narrative, insofar as it mentions that the 'massive migratory pressure'[34] is not diminishing. Overall, the second and third policy documents use a combination of lay and technocratic language: despite the 'urgent' opening of the Code of Conduct (mentioning migratory pressure), the narratives on NGOs are always placed in a broader context of migration management, to be regulated by institutional actors at different levels. Basically, the language is more nuanced and less 'lay', but the content of the narrative

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[33] Doc. 3, p. 18.
[34] Doc. 2, p. 1.

is very similar to the one adapted by the communicative sphere (particularly by the members of centre-left government). The emphasis is on an approach based on both humanitarian and securitarian elements, and the moral of the story is always a complex one that does not attribute direct responsibility and does not offer simplistic solutions, but aims at coordinating several factors.

g) Concluding remarks

The NGOs case appears to be the most complex and multifaceted, because of the presence of at least three concurrent narratives and a high level of polarisation of the debate, with a particularly broad variety of actors, including in particular an important role of the judiciary. Nonetheless, it exposes a more dynamic pattern of dissemination and circulation of narratives across the communicative and coordinative spheres and points to the fact that sometimes narratives are produced outside the media/political sphere.

At the same time, we found that the master narratives that emerged from the discourse, particularly those of the political and of the policy arenas, do not differ radically from those of case study n. 1 (Relocation plan during the so-called refugee crisis): the most recurrent features are the combination of humanitarian and securitarian narratives in the discourses of the government (supported by a centre-left majority in both 2015 and 2017); and the extremely populist discourses of the opposition, which builds on the metaphor of siege and invasion. Finally, even if this goes beyond the specific temporal scope of this case study, it is noteworthy that the circulation of narratives on the criminalisation of NGOs did not cease in 2017. On the contrary, in 2018 we witnessed a populist turn in the policy domain too, with the Ministry of Interior adopting a policy of 'closed ports' and accusing NGOs of being 'deputy smugglers' ('vice-scafisti'). This policy was based merely on tweets and media declarations, with no proper technical or legal documents adopted until 2019 (decree law on the ban to territorial waters to private vessels).

4. Conclusions across the three case studies

The three cases analysed show common patterns in terms of the circulation of narratives between the communicative and coordinative spheres. There is a close link between the themes and narratives reproduced in the media, according to their 'political affiliation', and in the parliamentary debates. In both arenas, the language is generally 'lay' in the communicative sphere, with some exceptions when it comes to MPs from the government majority, and a mixture of 'lay' and 'technocratic' in the coordinative sphere. It should be stressed that, in all three cases, the most populist narratives (characterised by the use of the siege metaphor, the framing of migration as a threat to Italians and the reference to regaining control over it through the exercise of sovereign powers) are found primarily in the political sphere. These narratives are only partially reflected in the media and quietly ignored by the policymaking spheres. We also found in all three cases that populist political movements feel very comfortable adopting polarised and divisive migration narratives, while mainstream politicians are more reluctant to engage in certain extreme narratives, and this is reflected in a different style of the latter, amounting to a combination of 'lay' and 'technocratic' language.

Overall, we can conclude that populist narratives have been tacitly ignored by centre-left politicians in government and by policy-makers responsible for implementing migration policies in 2015, 2017 and 2022. Nevertheless, in all three cases, the policy documents incorporate the issues raised by the main political actors (including far-right parties) and attempt to contextualise specific issues within a broader and more complex conceptualisation of the migration phenomenon, which tends to combine humanitarian obligations with security concerns. As a result, the most dominant narratives are based on a combination of humanitarian and securitarian elements.

Moreover, when comparing the three cases, it becomes clear that the extent to which a crisis event unfolds in a broader geopolitical context, especially at the EU level, it tends to lead to more bi-partisan narratives. In such scenarios, national interests (perceived in a bipartisan way) often prevail over those of individual political factions: this is very clear in case study 2 and also emerges from case study 1, while in case study 3, the media and political narratives are very polarised because they are somehow divorced from the need to promote Italian interests in the European arena. Finally, in all three cases, we found that a more technocratic style was used in the policy venues, even though the narratives often shared features with the communicative sphere, particularly with regard to references to security-oriented political solutions (or morality).

On the other hand, some specificities of cases 2 and 3 should be highlighted. In the Ukrainian case, security elements are completely removed from the narratives in the media and in the political arena: while they appear only in the populist discourses of far-right MPs, the mainstream and bipartisan narrative ignores such elements. The Ukrainian case is the only one where the emergency frame is not combined with a security frame, an almost unique feature in migration narratives, especially when large-scale unplanned arrivals are concerned. Instead, there is a broad consensus on humanitarian policy solutions and on the fact that migration is not the 'main crisis'. This can be explained by the different geopolitical context, as well as by the characteristics of migrants fleeing war (mainly 'European' women and children).

In the case of NGOs, the role of the judiciary in shaping a 'coordinative' lay narrative is a unique feature. Contrary to expectations, prosecutors, who are normally expected to mobilise technical expertise, adopt a lay style (simplistic, moralistic and detached from objective facts and evidence). Moreover, compared to the others, this case shows the highest degree of narrative polarisation. References to the master narratives of 'invasion' and 'siege' are explicit and dominant in all areas. It should be stressed that this event was the closest to a national parliamentary election in which immigration was a central issue, as reflected also in public opinion polls.

Regarding the patterns of interference between the media, political and policy narratives, we can conclude that there is a general alignment between the specific event-related narratives of the media and the political actors: usually, centrist and progressive media narratives are reflected or slightly adapted in MPs' discourses. Nevertheless, the elements of the narratives of the far-right parties (Norther League and Brothers of Italy) tend to be more populist and 'extreme' (e.g. in terms of plot or policy solutions) when compared to those of the right-wing media we analysed (this was particularly evident in case studies 1 and 2): this might also be due to the fact that *Il Giornale* is only one among several right-oriented newspapers and historically tends to be more in line with a liberal right. No clear causal or even only temporal

relationship was found between the media and the political sphere. However, political statements were often picked up by the media, suggesting mutual influence or a circular narrative pattern: this finding was supported by the interviews with former MPs, who pointed out that mainstream public media (such as the three newspapers we considered) tended to report party press releases without critical assessment. This results in the limited power of media narratives, which are mostly adapted in political discourses.

In terms of the processing of narratives between the communicative and coordinative spheres, patterns of influence are most evident in the justification of political solutions by members of the governing coalition. Overall, the policy domain does not embrace populist discourses: lay communicative narratives tend to influence policymakers in two directions, either through adaptation or rejection. Often there is a combination of both approaches: the coordinative sphere rejects the most populist elements of the communicative narratives and adapts its narrative around security positions by adopting a technocratic style. It is also important to note that in all three cases we analysed, the government and politicians who produced the narratives were part of centrist or centre-left parties: in 2015 and 2017, right-wing populist parties were in opposition, while in 2022 there was a broad coalition government.

Finally, when we looked at how the master narratives were mobilised in the three case studies, we found a conflation of humanitarian and security narratives in all cases, with the partial exception of Ukraine. While in the communicative sphere we found some narratives based solely on the security/siege master narratives and other narratives based exclusively on humanitarian positions, this juxtaposition is particularly prevalent in the political narratives. Irrespective of the specific crisis issue (e.g. resettlement, NGOs), the more the narratives are technocratic in style (with an expanded setting, a more complex plot, articulated and comprehensive morality), the more a combination of these two elements emerges in political discourses, demonstrating the pervasiveness of such narratives across time and regardless of the specific event (Garcés-Mascareñas and Pastore, 2022).

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Annex 1. List of newspapers articles

Il Corriere della Sera

10.9.2015, G. Belardelli, "Ma le paure vanno comprese"

11.9.2015, L. Offeddu, "Vienna ferma i treni dei profughi. Un muro tra Macedonia e Grecia"

14.9.2015, L. Offeddu, "In Grecia strage di bambini. Berlino chiude la frontiera"

15.9.2015, L. Cremonesi, "Piano italiano per le frontiere. Pronti i rinforzi di polizia"

28.6.2017, F. Sarzanini (editorial), "Fermezza inevitabile"

29.6.2017, F. Sarzanini, "«La Ue non ci aiuta, ora basta» Minniti punta all'asse con Berlino"

4.7.2017, F. Sarzanini, "«No a trasbordi e luci» Ecco il codice per le Ong"

14.7.2017, M. Gabanelli, "Le Ong possono forzare i blocchi negli altri porti"

27.2.2022, L. Cremonesi, "Leopoli, porto degli addii. Già 120 mila oltre frontiera. Anche Orban li accoglie"

28.2.2022, R. Frignani, "Possibili 4 milioni di profughi". I primi arrivi nel nostro Paese"

3.3.2022, V. Piccolillo, ""Andiamo a sfilare a Kiev". Salvini respinge gli attacchi"

10.3.2022, V. Postiglione, "Giorgia Meloni: «Giusto mandare le armi, non è l'ora di dividersi. A Salvini attacchi stucchevoli»"

Il Fatto Quotidiano

8.9.2015, G. Gramaglia, "Merkel, dai compiti a casa all'asilo per tutti"

10.9.2015, C. Minnucci, "Junker parla di Unione, i danesi chiudono le porte"

15.9.2015, G. Gramaglia, "La UE risponde al dramma con un accordicchio"

17.9.2015, E. Fierro, "L'Europa chiede gli hotspot all'Italietta del Cara di Mineo"

30.6.2017, G. Calapà, "Porti chiusi è una fake news del governo: non si può fare"

5.7.2017, G. Lo Bianco, "Fermata a Palermo la nave di Msf: documenti mancanti"

9.7.2017, G. Calapà, "Msf: "Adesso 2000 morti, con quelle regole di più"

14.7.2017, M. Travaglio (editorial), "Mandiamoli in Africa"

26.2.2022, G. Salvini, "Letta si mette l'elmetto, Salvini invece 'prega'"

4.3.2022, W. Marra, "I ministri europei. Permesso di un anno ai profughi ucraini"

8.3.2022, G. Salvini, "Salvini porta i profughi ucraini 'a casa sua'"

8.3.2022, M. Maggiore, A. Kalman, W. Ciesla, "C'è la guerra, tutto è perdonato. Polonia e Ungheria tra i 'buoni'"

Il Giornale

4.9.2015, G. Micalessin, "L'Europa è al tutti contro tutti. Ecco come si schierano i Paesi"

5.9.2015, G. Micalessin, "Parigi e Berlino scaricano Renzi. «Più centri di identificazione»"

12.9.2015, G. Micalessin, "Che beffa: col trucco ci hanno lasciato soltanto i clandestini"

15.9.2015, F. Biloslavo, "Bruxelles fa guerra agli scafisti. Per finta"

4.7.2017, G. Marino, "Rivincita del pm Zuccaro. Ora il personale Ong finisce sotto inchiesta"

4.7.2017, F. Biloslavo, "Ue, Libia e navi: i dubbi del piano-Minniti"

9.7.2017, P. Tagliaferri, "Cambia l'aria, salta il vertice. Tensione Ong-Capitaneria"

15.7.2017, C. Giannini, "Guinzaglio alle Ong. Sbarchi vietati in Italia a chi non firma il codice"

28.2.2022, L. Bulian, "Iniziato il grande esodo: già 200mila in Polonia «Diventeranno 7 milioni»"

4.3.2022, F. Angeli, "La bomba dei profughi"

5.3.2022, M. Sorbi, "Esodo disperato senza sosta. In Italia accolti 9mila ucraini"

9.3.2022, F. Angeli, "Atteso in Italia un milione di profughi. Ieri 4mila arrivi. Il Viminale lancia l'allarme: "un'ondata imponente"

Annex 2. List of Parliamentary debates

24.6.2015: Hearing of the Prime Minister on the government's position at the European Council of 25-26 June 2015, Chamber of Deputies (Assembly), n. 449, pp. 51-73.

18.9.2015: Parliamentary question posed by MP from the Partito Democratico – Democratic Party on legal pathways to Europe, Chamber of Deputies (Assembly), n. 485, pp. 28-32.

14.10.2015: Hearing of the Prime Minister on the Government's position at the European Council of 15-16 October 2015, Chamber of Deputies (Assembly), n. 502, pp. 1-34.

4.11.2015: Hearing of the Ministry of the Interior on the implementation of initiatives related to the European Agenda on Migration, Reunited Commission (Constitutional Affairs from the Chamber; Consitutional Affairs from the Senate), n. 3, pp. 3-16.

9.5.2017, Motion promoted by centre-left MPs on the issue of identification of dead migrants in the Mediterranean, Chamber of Deputies (Assembly), n. 792, pp. 38-51.

9.7.2017, Question time to the Ministry of Interior on the management of migration flows, Chamber of Deputies (Assembly), n. 827, pp. 58-72.

19.7.2017: Parliamentary hearing of the Minister of Interior on the NGO Code of conduct, Chamber of Deputies (Assembly), n. 837, pp. 52-54.

1.3.2022: Hearing of Prime Minister Mario Draghi on the urgent developments of the war between Russia and Ukraine, Chamber of Deputies (Assembly), n. 648, pp. 17-49.

1.3.2022: Hearing of Prime Minister Mario Draghi on the urgent developments of the war between Russia and Ukraine, Senate of the Republic (Assembly), n. 410, pp. 6-51.

14. 3.2022: Debate on the adoption of law 5 April 2022, n. 28, converting Legislative Decree 28 February 2022, n. 14, Chamber of Deputies (Assembly), n. 656, pp. 1-30.

13.4.2022: Parliamentary question to the Ministry of the Interior on the functioning of the reception system, Chamber of Deputies (Assembly), n.677, p.69-71.

Annex 3. List of policy documents

3.5.2016. Report of the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on reception and detention centres

26.5.2016. Hotspots Standard Operational Procedures - SOP (Ministry of Interior)

19.10.2016. Parliamentary Committee for the monitoring of the implementation of the Schengen Agreement. Hearing of the Head of the Immigration Department, Mario Morcone

6.5.2017. Parliamentary committee of inquiry on the reception, identification and expulsion system, as well as the conditions of detention of migrants and the public resources used. Hearing of Catania's Court Public Prosecutor, Carmelo Zuccaro.

31.7.2017. Code of Conduct for NGOs involved in rescue operations of migrants at sea (Ministry of Interior)

31.1.2018. Report on the Search and Rescue (SAR) activities in the Central Mediterranean (General Command of the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center Rome)

30.3.2022. Parliamentary committee for monitoring the implementation of the Schengen Agreement. Hearing of the Ministry of Interior, Luciana Lamorgese.

13.4.2022. National Plan for the Assistance and Reception of People Fleeing the War in Ukraine (Ministry of the Interior)

19.4.2023. Explanatory Comment on the Law Decree L. 16/2023 on temporary protection measures for Ukrainian refugees adopted by the Council of Ministries (Study Service of the Chamber of Deputies)

Annex 4. List of key informant interviews

Interview n. 1: Current member of Parliament (Partito Democratico – Democratic Party), 29.5.2023

Interview n. 2: Former member of Parliament (Partito Democratico – Democratic Party), 1.6.2023

Interview n. 3: Former Head of Department of Immigration (Ministry of Interior Office), 13.6.2023

Interview n. 4: Public servant (Civil Protection Department, Prime Ministry Office), 27/06/2023