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## **The Securitization of Irregular Migration: The EU Response to Migrant Smuggling in the Central Mediterranean**

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# The Securitization of Irregular Migration

The EU Response to Migrant Smuggling in the Central Mediterranean



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**Table of Contents:**

<b>Table of Contents:</b>	2
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	4
<b>1.1.: Research Question and Relevance</b>	5
<b>Societal and academic relevance</b>	6
<b>Reading guide</b>	7
<b>Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework</b>	8
<b>2.1: A Reconceptualization of Security</b>	8
<b>2.1.1: Transboundary Security Issues in the European Union</b>	8
<b>2.1.2: The Internal-External Security Nexus</b>	10
<b>2.2: Conceptualization of Migration</b>	10
<b>2.2.1: International Migration</b>	10
<b>2.2.2: Forced Migration and Refugees</b>	11
<b>2.2.3: Irregular Migration</b>	13
<b>2.3: Securitization and the Securitization of Migration in the EU</b>	15
<b>2.3.1: Securitization theory</b>	15
<b>2.3.2: Migration in the EU: Securitized?</b>	17
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b>	19
<b>3.1: Discourse analysis</b>	19
<b>Identity &amp; Othering</b>	21
<b>3.2: Research Methods</b>	22
<b>Case selection, data selection &amp; analysis</b>	23
<b>Limitations</b>	24
<b>Chapter 4: Analysis</b>	25
<b>4.1: Operation Mare Nostrum (October 2013 - October 2014): background and context</b>	25
<b>4.1.1: The EU discourse on irregular migration during the Mare Nostrum mission</b>	26
<b>4.1.2: Discussion</b>	32
<b>4.2: Operation Triton (November 2014 - Februari 2018): background and context</b>	33
<b>4.2.1: The EU discourse on irregular migration during Operation Triton</b>	35
<b>4.2.2: Discussion</b>	40

<b>4.3: Operation Sophia (EUNAVFOR MED Sophia)(June 2015 - March 2020): background and context</b>	40
<b>4.3.1: The EU discourse on irregular migration during EUNAVFOR Med Sophia</b>	41
<b>4.3.2: Discussion</b>	47
<b>Chapter 5: Answering the research question</b>	49
<b>5.1: Securitization in the EU discourse on irregular migration and migrant smuggling</b>	49
<b>5.1.1: Othering</b>	49
<b>5.1.2: EU solidarity and cooperation</b>	50
<b>5.2: Securitization in EU policy directed towards irregular migration and migrant smuggling</b>	50
<b>5.3: Recommendations</b>	51
<b>Bibliography:</b>	53

## Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Sub-Saharan Africa accommodates around 26 percent of the refugee population worldwide (UNHCR, n.d.). Crises in different African countries, such as South Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo to name a few, have displaced millions of people. A poignant example of what the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa causes is the tragedy that occurred in October 2013, on the island of Lampedusa. A boat carrying more than 500 people, mostly Eritreans, capsized less than a kilometer away from shore. 366 people drowned (Nelson, 2014). Simultaneously, the conflict in Syria has forced millions of Syrians to flee from 2011 onwards.

In the years after 2011, countries within the European Union (EU) , especially in the Mediterranean, saw an increasing number of asylum applications. The EU was faced with an enormous challenge: European countries' asylum systems lacked the capacity to handle the amount of refugees. At the same time a humanitarian crisis was unfolding in the Mediterranean borderlands that could not be overlooked. Although the response to what is now referred to as the European refugee crisis differed among EU countries, the generic approach was to secure the EU's borders. The militarization of the borders was realized through various policies, ranging from the reinforcement of physical borders to military anti-smuggling missions (Simpson, 2020). The possibilities for refugees to enter the EU legally are limited, therefore they are relying heavily on the efforts of smugglers to help them reach their destination. Consequently, illegal migration, also referred to as irregular migration, has gained a prominent position on the EU policy agenda.

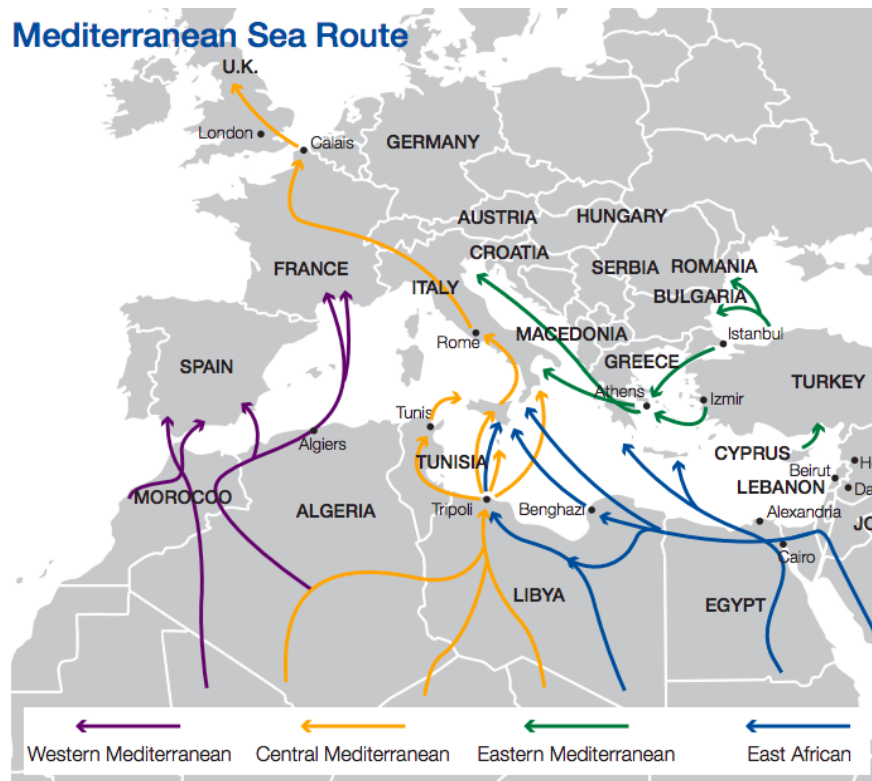
This development, including the militarization of border management, is also discussed in the context of securitization. Long before the refugee crisis, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the academic debate on the securitization of migration gained momentum. After 2001 the Western political narrative became centered around the dangers of migration, often linking it to terrorism. Whereas the majority of scholars argue that migration has undergone a process of securitization by, for example, speaking about the 'security-migration nexus' (Karyotis, 2007), some offer an alternative by arguing that the threat of terrorism did not affect the EU's political discourse and practice (Boswell, 2007). The 2015 refugee crisis intensified this debate.

### **1.1.: Research Question and Relevance**

In the context of these developments and the aforementioned debate this thesis aims to research the following question: to what extent did the EU's framing of irregular migration across the Mediterranean between 2013 and 2019 reflect a process of securitization? The sub-questions that will help guide towards the answer of this question are: 1) How did the EU government frame irregular migration and migrant smuggling in particular? 2) To what extent is there a convergence between the frame and policy? The extent of securitization is measured through the comparison of the discourse during three different missions along the Central Mediterranean migration route.

This research focuses on EU statements and policy initiatives between 2013 and 2019, because it aims to capture the response of the EU to the peak of the refugee crisis in 2015. Since the refugee crisis has no clear beginning, which is an important characteristic of a crisis, the Lampedusa tragedy is the starting point of this thesis. The incident shocked the European community and the EU institutions alike. In response to the Lampedusa tragedy, Italy launched a search and rescue (SAR) operation: Mare Nostrum. This operation is the first component of the case study analyzed in Chapter 4. The subsequent section examines Mare Nostrum's 'successor': Frontex Operation Triton. Lastly, Frontex EUNAVFOR Med (ENFM) Operation Sophia is analyzed. All three missions are situated in the Mediterranean, along the Central Mediterranean migration Route. Operation Sophia officially ended in March 2020; however, from March 2019 no naval vessels were deployed in the Mediterranean under the mandate of the operation. For this reason, the time frame ends in 2019. A further explanation of how the case studies are conducted is provided in the methodology.

Figure 1: Migration routes in the Mediterranean



source: *World Economic Forum*, 2017

### *Societal and academic relevance*

From a humanitarian perspective, it is important to research the impact of EU migration policies on refugees and migrants. The United Nations (UN) Conventions and Humanitarian Law are the building blocks of EU values. Because the European Union does not have coercive power, it is often referred to as a civilian, or normative, power. The creation of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, is an interesting development in this context. Particularly important in the light of irregular migration is the 1951 UN refugee convention. Is the EU capable of upholding their humanitarian responsibilities in its fight against irregular migration, as discussed in this research? In addition, this study demonstrates the issue of EU integration and the difficulties of policy making at the EU level, when there is no consensus and/or solidarity among its Member States. Lastly, if (irregular) migration has indeed been securitized, this has ethical implications. This is because when something becomes a security issue, exceptional measures are allowed.

Because the EU is an intergovernmental institution, it naturally deals with transboundary issues. Increasing globalization closes the divide between internal and external security further. The externalization of a part of EU migration policy is an example of this. Cooperation with non-EU countries, as is the case with Operation Sophia, is deemed necessary to tackle issues, such as irregular migration, that cross the classical internal-external security divide. This ‘blurring divide’ also has an impact on government behaviour (Eriksson & Rhinard, 2009). This brings us to the academic relevance of this research. Besides its contribution to the debate on the securitization of migration in the European Union, this study aims to make connections between literature on migration, human rights, internal-external security and securitization in order to provide a more holistic view of the issue. Moreover, it gives insight into the interplay between political discourse and policy. This thesis will argue that securitization did occur in the EU discourse on irregular migration.

### *Reading guide*

The thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1, the current chapter, sets the scene and provides the reader with the context and goal of this research. Chapter 2 discusses relevant literature and concepts, starting with transboundary security issues. An increasing number of today’s crises are transboundary in nature, including the refugee crisis. Discussing the characteristics of the transboundary crisis helps the reader to better understand the dynamics of the refugee crisis. Securitization theory is at the core of this research. Therefore its roots and dimensions are thoroughly explained. The next section in Chapter 2 deals with the topic of migration. Here the differences between terms such as ‘refugee’, ‘migrant’, and ‘regular’ and ‘irregular migration’ are described. Subsequently, the debate on securitization of migration in the EU is discussed. Although there is a great amount of literature supporting the statement that migration has undergone the process of securitization before and during the refugee crisis, multiple scholars argue against it. Chapter 3, methodology, explains the reader how certain choices concerning the case selection and research methods were made. Finally, Chapter 4 contains the analysis of the aforementioned case studies. Each case study contains three subchapters. First, EU documents and statements are analyzed. Then the corresponding policy is discussed. Ultimately, a short discussion will provide the answers to the sub-questions and the implications of the findings. Lastly, chapter four incorporates all the findings of the analysis in a logical argument to answer the research question. This thesis will argue that irregular migration underwent a process of securitization from 2013-2019.



## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework**

This research is built around several concepts and theories. The next section provides an overview of the literature that discusses these notions, in addition to their definitions. First of all, the transboundary nature of today's security issues is explained. The following section describes migration in a EU context, including irregular migration and the academic debate on the securitization of migration in the EU.

### **2.1: A Reconceptualization of Security**

A great amount of the literature on crisis related subjects speaks of the changing nature of today's security threats. (Ullman, 1983; Baldwin, 1997; Boin and Rhinard, 2008). The end of the Cold War marked a turning point regarding threat perception and the conceptualization of security. In addition, the European Union is not a traditional, military power, but is instead often described as a 'normative' power because of "its lack of coercive instruments" (Hyde-Price 2006, p. 217). Whereas security in the traditional sense encompasses a strong internal/external divide, issues such as irregular migration crosses this divide. The next section discusses this change in the security rationale.

#### **2.1.1: Transboundary Security Issues in the European Union**

Security in the traditional sense is understood in terms of military power. Government officials cling to the distinction between low and high politics. Only issues that could possibly be solved or addressed by the use of military force were considered security issues. As Baldwin states: "if military force was not relevant, issues were assigned to the realm of low politics" (1997, p. 9). During the Cold War period, scholars already started expressing discontent about the narrow definition of security in the bi-polar world order. Ullman (1983), for example, argues that "the false image" of "defining national security merely (or even primarily) in military terms" is deceptive and thus dangerous (p. 129). He explains that states complying with this narrow definition have the tendency to solely focus on military threats and consequently often ignore other security risks. Moreover, this narrow focus in international relations "contributes to a pervasive militarization of international relations that in the long run can only increase global insecurity" (p. 129).

After the fall of the iron curtain the argument in favor of expanding the concept of security gained momentum. The decline of military threats, such as the threat of nuclear war, gave

room for “‘new’ national and international” matters, such as environmental, societal and economic issues (Ferreira, 2019, p. 31). What makes these challenges different is due to both the nature of the threat and how society is organized (Boin and Rhinard, 2008).

Boin (2019) explains the transboundary nature of these ‘new’ crises and its implications for policy-makers. First of all, the transboundary crisis is not confined to one domain or geographical area. Second, “the transboundary crisis is characterized by periods of slow, often imperceptible development and phases of rapid escalation”(p. 95). Third, as the crisis is unfolding it is difficult to establish the root causes of the crisis and its ramifications. Fourth, because the transboundary crisis crosses multiple domains its solution has to involve multiple actors. However, it is unclear who has the responsibility for which task “or who has the capacity to perform certain tasks”. The organizational boundaries that normally promote an adequate response become obscured during a transboundary crisis (p. 95). The fifth and last characteristic described by Boin is that, in contrast to most policy issues, there are no conventional solutions for transboundary crises.

These characteristics can be identified across multiple present-day issues. An example is the covid 19 pandemic. In its initial phase, the outbreak was limited to Wuhan, but soon it escalated and the infection moved across the globe. The exact causes of the crisis and the characteristics of the virus were not well understood and it affected multiple industries, ranging from tourism to beauty to fitness etc. This also proves that the organization of today’s society intensifies “the dynamics of transboundary security issues” (Kaldor, 2006, as cited in Eriksson and Rhinard, 2009, p. 246). Irregular migration, as this thesis discusses, is also a transboundary crisis. Migrants come from abroad to the EU. Without tackling the root causes in their country of origin, the influx will continue. Due to globalization there are tight social, economical and political connections between societies. As a result, “the way risks travel is fluid and unpredictable” (Castells, 1996, as cited in Eriksson and Rhinard, 2009, p. 246 ).

The reconceptualization of security, however, does not exclude the traditional application of the concept, although “in the contemporary European context” the conventional definition bears several complications (Anderson, 2007, p. 33). First, not all EU Member States share the same core societal values. In addition, if the whole continent did have shared values, the defense of these values would not occur through the means of “the coercive powers of the state or with security forces as conventionally understood”, but through policy instruments.

Last, the traditional definition of security does not recognize “that security policy has become as much about the management of insecurities as it is about keeping enemies at bay” (p. 33).

### **2.1.2: The Internal-External Security Nexus**

Increasing European integration in the Post-Cold War era finally led to the development of the EU’s ‘area of freedom, security and justice’ (AFSJ). One of the core components of AFSJ is the free movement of goods and people within the Union’s borders. Regardless of the fact that the security rationale of the AFSJ focuses on internal security, in order to ensure this free movement and the internal security of the EU the externalization of security efforts is inevitable (Ioannides, 2014; Monar, 2010). At the same time the emergence of transboundary threats and crises has caused the corrosion of the distinction between internal and external security. However, instead of speaking of a ‘dissolving divide’, Eriksson and Rhinard (2009) argue for the adaptation of the term ‘internal-external security nexus’ in order to avoid analytical imprecision. Their proposed analytical framework is a means to (a) comprehend the nexus “of internal and external security matters, and (b)” clarify “why the nexus may change state behaviour on transboundary security issues” (p. 243). The framework concentrates on the “critical connections” between the dimensions that affect the relationship between internal and external security. The 2015 refugee crisis is an example of a crisis within the internal-external security nexus. Although Eriksson and Rhinard’s (2009) framework is not directly applied in this research, their article served as a source of inspiration and has helped to establish the argument made in this thesis.

## **2.2: Conceptualization of Migration**

The phenomenon of migration runs through human history like a thread. It is in no way a modern day occurrence. What makes today’s migration flows different, however, is the presence of nation-states and borders. Even though migration within a national setting also occurs, international migration substantially affects both national and international politics. For this reason, this section focuses on international migration in the EU context.

### **2.2.1: International Migration**

International migration as defined by Bartram, Poros and Monforte (2014) “is the movement of people to another country, leading to temporary or permanent resettlement” (p. 4). They add to this that when international migration flows grow “it commonly raises questions about

national identities and social membership” (p. 4). There are a variety of reasons for people to migrate to another country. But according to Martin, Abella and Kuptsch (2006) these can be reduced to one thing: “international migration is a response to differences between countries” (as quoted in Bartram et al. 2014, p. 5). If people’s desires or necessities are not available in their own country, they will move somewhere else to find what they want and/or need.

### **2.2.2: Forced Migration and Refugees**

The International Organization of Migration (IOM) defines forced migration as “a migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion” (Forced Migration, 2013). A similar definition is provided by Bartram et al. (2014), who define forced migration as “migration that results from some sort of compulsion or threat to wellbeing or survival, emerging in conditions ranging from violent conflict to severe economic hardship” (p. 69). Engaging in forced migration and having a refugee status may, at first glance, seem quite similar in their meaning; however, a refugee is just one manifestation of forced migration.

Castles (2003) outlines the different categories within the concept of forced migration. A refugee is someone who is outside his or her country of nationality. Internally displaced persons are people who were forced to flee but remain inside the borders of their country. Asylum seekers are people who did not receive the refugee status yet because they applied for asylum and still have to await the processing of their application. Then there are people that are forced to leave their home due to environmental or developmental reasons. The development of infrastructures, such as airports or hydro-dams, conservation areas and housing displaces around 10 million people a year (Castles, 2003). The last form of forced migration as outlined by Castles (2003) is that of the trafficking of human beings from one country to another “for purposes of exploitation” (p. 15). These categories are also stated in other articles on forced migration. Betts (2014), for example, discusses internal displacement, environmental displacement and statelessness and their relationship to the nation state. Forced migration, according to Betts, is a symptom of a failing nation-state system. It is when the nation-state cannot ensure the safety of its citizens, as is the case in all the categories mentioned above, that they ask the international community to protect them.

The post-Second World War period was an important time for migration and refugee law. World War II had left thousands of people displaced. The United Nations, created in 1945,

took it as their job to deal with this problem and consequently, from the beginning of the postwar era, “asylum seekers and refugees critically shaped the landscape of international politics” (Cohen, 2012, p. 2). However, with the problem being centered in Europe, non-Western countries were not greatly involved in the discussions about European refugees (Cohen, 2012). Yuval-Davis (2013) also recognizes the great Western influence in the development of the formal international protection of refugees (p. 55). The adoption of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention was hoped to be of aid to refugees and end the WWII refugee crisis. The definition of a refugee as put by the 1951 UN Refugee Convention is:

*“[Any person who] owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951).*

Several authors highlight the limited scope of the UN definition of a refugee. For example, in his book Asserate (2018) lists several instances to which the definition does not apply. Due to the requirement that one has to be outside of his or her country of nationality, internally displaced persons do not qualify for international protection. Furthermore, the person fleeing has to carry an additional burden: the burden of proving that one or more of the grounds for becoming a refugee listed in the 1951 Convention applies to them. Asserate (2018) also emphasizes the absence of environmental and natural disasters and gender-based persecution; however, the UNHCR does provide additional guidelines on the issue of gender-based persecution (Guidelines on International Protection, 2002) Their argument for not including gender-based persecution to the 1951 definition is that there is a general agreement that gender can affect “the type of persecution or harm suffered and the reasons for this treatment” (p. 3). Thus, gender-related claims are covered by the definition, if interpreted correctly. The Convention does not include economic hardship as one of their grounds in their definition. Leaving your country in search of economic opportunities is often regarded as a voluntary act. Further in his book, Asserate explains how society distinguishes “between (enforced) flight and (voluntary) migration”. People in the first category are regarded as

‘good’ refugees, while people in the latter, e.g. economic migrants, are viewed as ‘bad’ refugees (2018, p. 18). This brings us to one of the difficulties in the concept of ‘forced migration’. How does one determine what counts as compulsion and what not? This is one of the reasons that many scholars, including Asserate (2018) reject the dichotomy between refugees and economic migrants. Moreover, holding on to the dichotomy “obscures our view of the extent and the reasons for the worldwide movement of refugees” (p. 18). Despite his critique on the UN refugee definition, Asserate does not explicitly provide an alternative.

In line with Asserate (2018), Castles (2003), Gibney (2014) and Shacknove (1985) also recognize the narrow scope of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Shacknove (1985) presents a substitute definition. According to him, the conceptualization of the word ‘refugee’ should include every person “whose basic needs are unprotected by their country of origin” and who do not have another alternative “than to seek international restitution of their needs” (p. 277). The issue with this definition is, however, that although the persons fleeing are helped with this, this broad definition carries the potential to overwhelm destination countries.

Over the years the European Union has worked on an integrated migration and asylum policy while the “number of asylum seekers from the South” kept increasing. However, despite the growing attention within the EU to the migration issue, there has been an influx of regulations which make applying for a refugee states increasingly difficult (Yuval-Davis 2013, p. 55). Due to the restrictions to legal migration, people fleeing often resort to illegal ways to enter the EU.

### **2.2.3: Irregular Migration**

The word ‘illegal’ in migration terminology is increasingly often substituted with the word ‘irregular’. There are a multitude of reasons for this, however, this section only provides the one that is the most relevant to this thesis.

Putting the label ‘illegal’ on migrants is a way of criminalizing them. Criminalization happens through both legal and social constructions (Kubal, 2014). Over the years, criminal law has found its way into the domain of migration. While this primarily serves as symbolism to show that the government has a solid hold on immigration control, this has made room for discourse which presents migrants as either abusers of a system or potential criminals. (p. 91). In addition, the labelling of migrants as illegal has in numerous cases criminalized the

people that try to help them (UNHCR, 2018). For example, there were multiple instances of NGOs facing charges for rescuing people at sea, even though their actions are in line with the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, which requires states to rescue “persons in distress” in their territorial waters, no matter what the legal status of these people is (Lloyd-Damnjanovic, 2020). The criminalization of migration puts migrants’ lives at risk.

In addition to the legal criminalization, the criminal discourse around migration is also harmful. Assigning the word ‘illegal’ to migrants depicts them as criminals, a threat to society and undeserving and dishonest human beings. This type of branding gives leeway to the prosecution and punishment of irregular migrants. It also enables enforcement, the use of restraint, and systematic detention in the immigration process (UNHCR, 2018). This is the main reason for using the term ‘irregular’ instead of ‘illegal’. ‘Irregular migration’ is defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as the “movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination” (“*Key Migration Terms*”, n.d.). Koser (2010) elaborates on this notion by including in what ways migratory processes occur outside the legal system. Irregular migration consists of, for example, entering a country with false documents or without authorization, people overstaying their visas and people that were smuggled or trafficked. The focus in this research is on the latter and the smuggling of migrants in specific.

Although the meaning of the terms ‘human smuggling’ and ‘human trafficking’ might seem straightforward, they do require some further explanation. ‘Smuggling’ and ‘trafficking’ are often used interchangeably, however, although they overlap in some instances, there are important differences. The most apparent distinction is that traffickers often coerce or deceive migrants, whereas smugglers solely offer aid to migrants without proper documentation to cross borders (Bartram, Poros and Monforte, 2014, p. 80). Gallagher (2002, as cited in Castles and Miller 2009, p. 202) describes migrant smuggling as a commercial transaction, in which smugglers and migrants are in essence partners, despite it being an unequal partnership. She adds that trafficking, in addition to the elements of deception and coercion, often has the goal of exploitation of the trafficked persons. One of the most common forms of human trafficking is sex trafficking. Smugglers are often paid in advance, so that migrants do not have a debt when they arrive at their destination. Traffickers, on the other hand, often use

the migrants' debt as leverage to make them work for them (Bartram, Poros and Monforte, 2014). The profit then, for human traffickers, comes not from bringing the trafficked from point A to point B, but from selling their services, being it labour or sex, in the destination country.

There are instances in which smuggling and trafficking conceptually overlap and although the differences mentioned above suggest a clear distinction, according to Castles and Miller (2009) this dichotomy is false. For example, a migrant can find help from a smuggler, arrive at their destination and still end up being trafficked and exploited by another party. In order to halt the increasing numbers of (irregular) migrants entering, the EU and the United States, have implemented increasingly restrictive measures. The unintended outcomes of these measures are however painful. Restricted access has created more opportunities for smugglers and traffickers, as it has become harder to enter the EU without help. In addition, by making it more difficult, smugglers have to take more dangerous routes, thereby increasing the risk and logically the price that migrants have to pay. As a result of the increased risk, migrant deaths due to smuggling and trafficking have increased (Castles and Miller, 2009). This has allowed the EU to villainize migrant smugglers in the context of its 'mission' to prevent deaths among irregular migrants attempting the crossing of the Central Mediterranean.

### **2.3: Securitization and the Securitization of Migration in the EU**

As mentioned in the previous section about transboundary security threats, in a traditional understanding of security the state is the referent object and (military) force is used to ensure the security of the nation state. Constructivists and poststructuralists have critiqued this Realist notion of security as being too narrow in its definition, "suggesting instead that threats are socially constructed" (Trombetta, 2008, p. 587).

#### **2.3.1: Securitization theory**

The Copenhagen School developed securitization theory in order to conceptualize the social construction of threats. Buzan and Waever define securitization as "the discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat" (2003, p. 491). This means that the nature of the threat is not relevant in the process of an issue becoming an issue of security.



Rather, it is the way that an issue is presented through a ‘speech act’. If this speech act is successful, the process of securitization has succeeded and consequently transforms the way of dealing with an issue. From this point of view, security “is not a value or condition but a form of social practice” (Trombetta, 2008, p. 588). When an issue is accepted as a security issue, it becomes subject to the security rationale. As Trombetta states: “security is about survival, urgency and emergency” (p. 588). In the security domain, otherwise binding rules can be broken and exceptional measures are allowed. Within the securitization process there are three conditions that decide whether the process is successful or not. These are: “linguistic-grammatical composition, social capital of the securitising actors and existing social knowledge”(Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, 1998, 24 as cited in Watson, 2012, p. 283). Securitization is only successful in the case that the issue is accepted by a significant audience, thus an attempt to securitize an issue can also fail (Watson, 2014). In theory everyone can be a securitizing actor. In reality, however, security speakers need to have a certain level of authority. Moreover, in a democratic society a person with low authority will have more opportunities to become a securitizing actor than those living in non-democratic societies. Following this line of thought, one of the critiques on the Copenhagen School and their securitization theory is that it is mainly Western focused. In the non-Western, non-democratic societies where communicating (societal) security concerns as a civilian can cost you your freedom or your life, people engage in other forms of expressing their concerns, migration being one of them (Wilkinson, 2007). Thus, securitization does not have to be limited to speech acts only. More recent understandings of securitization theory have included actions and subsequently, “while early formulations of securitization theory drew heavily on speech act theory”, today securitization is also understood “as an act or a process” (Watson, 2014, p. 283). Balzacq (2011) adds that securitization can take on multiple forms: it can be “discursive and non-discursive, intentional and non-intentional” (p. 2).

Thus, for example, when analyzing the securitization process with the EU as the referent object, not only can their meetings and speeches indicate securitization attempts, but their policies as well. This thesis will look at both the speech act and the corresponding policy in order to multiple forms of securitization in EU discourse. By doing this one can also find out whether discourse always takes the same form across multiple dimensions.

### 2.3.2: Migration in the EU: Securitized?

There is a widespread debate about the securitization of migration in the EU context. These discussions center around the question whether there have been attempts to securitize migration and types of migration in the EU but also whether these attempts have been successful. Ferreira (2019) argues that migration in the EU has been securitized and outlines the security concerns of migration along four quadrants. On the socio-economic axis migration is associated with “unemployment, the rise of the informal economy, the crisis of the welfare state and ghetto problems” (p. 70). The security axis links “human mobility with a control narrative that associates the issues of sovereignty, borders and both internal and external security” (p. 70). Third, migrants are seen as a threat to the national identity of their destination country and finally, the political axis. In order to gain “political benefits” this axis relies on anti-immigrant discourses. Ferreira considers there to be a strong connection between migration and security. However, she continues that this is particularly the case for irregular migration, thus her claim that migration is securitized is too great, since her analysis focuses on one type of migration only. Baele and Sterck (2015) support this idea. In their research they analyze four samples: legal immigration, asylum, illegal immigration and borders. Their findings included high levels of security language in EU texts discussing immigration; however, these high levels did not pertain across all subfields of migration. The lowest, logically, was legal immigration and the subfield with the highest level of security language was illegal immigration. Hintjens (2019), however, writes about the failed securitization moves of the EU in light of irregular migration. She argues that the EU’s declared war on the criminal networks responsible for the smuggling of migrants “failed to gain legitimacy from EU publics and media” (p. 181).

The events of 9/11 are often regarded as the instigator of the securitization of migration in the Western world. According to Karyotis (2007), for example, the terrorism threat that followed 9/11 has contributed to EU immigration policy today. In a similar fashion, Baker-Beall (2019) analyzes the role of the ‘returning foreign fighter’ in the securitization of migration in a EU context. Although there are many authors arguing in favor of the securitization of migration, there are also scholars, in addition to Hintjens (2019) that refute it. Boswell (2007), for instance, finds little evidence of EU attempts to securitize migration. Furthermore, in line with Hintjens, she argues that the few attempts that occurred, failed.

To sum up, the securitization of migration in the EU is a contested subject. While some claim that it has been securitized as a whole, some only recognize the securitization of some of the subfields of immigration. Then there is another group that denies that migration has been securitized. This research aims to contribute to the debate on the securitization of migration by arguing that, despite the EU's focus on humanitarianism, the Union did securitize irregular migration.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This qualitative research aims to analyze the discourse around irregular migration in EU institutions and whether it reflects a process of securitization. This is done through a case study of the EU response to irregular migration along the Central Mediterranean route from 2013 until 2019. Since the research question is dealing with discourse, logically a discourse analysis will be applied. There are a multitude of ways to conduct a discourse analysis; however, explaining them all defeats the purpose of this research. For this reason, the section below discusses discourse analysis as a research method and in doing so shortly outlines the most prominent approaches, including the one applied in this thesis. Next, the framework used in this research is explained, including data selection and analysis and the limitations of using these methods.

#### **3.1: Discourse analysis**

Scholars in various academic fields, such as psychology, linguistics, and international relations, use discourse analysis as a research method. In short, academics that study discourse, study the use of language and how it shapes the world around us. Discourse analysis follows the premise that meanings are constructed. As Kölher (2019) states, “what appears to be true has been established as such [...] through language” (p. 7). Jørgenson and Phillips (2002) expand on this statement. In their article they explain several approaches to the social constructivist discourse analysis and that despite their differences, they all root in the same idea: “our ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations, but, rather, play an active role in creating and changing them” (p. 1).

The study of discourse is not only limited to spoken language; it also includes written text, body language and other non-verbal communication. One well known approach to this research method is a critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA has its origins in constructivism, with Michel Foucault as a major influence. In CDA power is an influential concept. Critical discourse analysis is concerned with uncovering the dynamics of the “relationship between language, ideology, power and social structure [...] as it is constructed, re-produced, legitimized, and resisted in language and other modes of communication” (Catalano and Waugh, 2020, p. 1). Framing plays an important role in the perception of migration in the EU. Frame analysis is another way of conducting a discourse analysis and is often applied in social movements research and communication and media studies (Benford and Snow, 2000). While discourse analysis can raise awareness about “the linguistic means by which frames

are created in interaction, the concept of framing provides a fruitful theoretical foundation for the discourse analysis of interaction” (Tannen, 1993). Framing is a critical component of policy practice, especially “what and who is actually included, and what and who is ignored and excluded” (Gasper and Apthorpe, 1996).

In her work, Hansen (2006) extensively discusses discourse analysis, with a particular focus on political discourse. She explains that the meaning of ‘discourse’ does not only entail ‘ideas’, but also includes material factors. Throughout her chapters she builds a theoretical framework for discourse analysis focusing on policy discourse. This framework consists of four dimensions: intertextuality, the number of Selves, the temporal perspective and the number of events.

Intertextuality refers to the notion that, although texts are unique, they are situated in “a shared textual space” (2006, p. 49). The meaning of a text is constructed through explicit and implicit references to other texts. This is also true for official foreign policy texts. The references made are not limited to texts that are similar, but can also include “journalism, academic writing, popular non-fiction and, potentially, even fiction (p. 49). Hansen discusses three intertextual models. Model 1, official discourse, centers on actors within the political realm, including politicians, senior civil servants, and high ranking military staff. A requirement is that these actors need to have “official authority to sanction the foreign policies pursued” (p. 53). Model 2 expands the scope of the analysis by also including “major actors and arenas within a wider foreign policy debate” (p. 54). Model 2 contains, for example, the media discourse in addition to the official discourse. Model 3 is divided into two sub-models. Sub-model 3A expands the scope of analysis by including “material not explicitly engaging official policy discourse”, such as, film, poetry and computer games. Sub-model 3B is concerned with marginal political discourses within, for instance, social movements. The second dimension of Hansen’s framework is the number of Selves, or the amount of subjects “one wishes to examine”. By analyzing multiple selves, one can make a comparison between how different countries respond to the same policy issue to name an example. This is what is referred to as the ‘multiple Self option’ (p. 68). Another option for analysis is a *discursive encounter*. Instead of comparing multiple Selves, a *discursive encounter* “contrasts the discourse of the Self with the Other’s ‘counter-construction of Self and Other” (p. 68). The third dimension is the temporal perspective. One can study foreign

policy addressing an event “at one particular moment or through a longer historical analysis” (p. 69). Finally, “foreign policy can be studied as it addresses events either at one particular moment or through a longer historical analysis” (p. 69). Single moment studies are often concentrated on moments that had a great impact and were “the subject of intense political concern” (p. 69). Examples of such moments are wars, conflicts and other crises. Studies of multiple events can take the form of a comparison of “a smaller number of events”, but can also be a thorough historical analysis mapping the development “of identities across centuries” (pp. 69,70).

### *Identity & Othering*

Discourse and the notion of identity cannot be seen separate from each other. Likewise, nationstates and borders would become futile concepts without an identity linked to them. Because the European Union consists of many different states with all their own identity, the EU has created its shared identity around values, such as democracy, freedom and human rights. This identity is expressed through EU discourse and policy, as discussed in this thesis.

Hansen (2006) explains that “language is social and political”. Within the system of language, meaning is created “through a simultaneous construction of identity and difference” (p. 15). Language has the ability to construct “problems and subjectivities” on which policy discourse relies. At the same time, however, discourse produces these very “problems and subjectivities”. This means that the relationship between identity and policy is not causal, however, they continuously affect and reflect each other. For example, Beaker-Bill argues that EU counter-terrorism policies “are constituted through representations of identity, but is it also through the formulation of counter-terrorism policy that the identity of the EU is created and recreated” (2016, p. 2). In the context of Hansen’s understanding of “language as political”, language becomes a place “for the production and reproduction of particular subjectivities and identities while others are simultaneously excluded” (2006, p. 16). The identity of the Self is constructed through the creation of the Other. ‘Othering’ is also an important notion within securitization theory. A state’s identity is accomplished through the separation of the internal and the external. However, “the national and the international are not simply two different political spheres”. They “are constructed as each other’s opposites, as each other’s constitutive Other” (2006, p. 30).

This process is also visible in the EU's discourse on irregular migration. For example, the EU's identity is constructed around its democratic and humanitarian values. This identity is also established through the EU's discourse on irregular migration, as reflected in their documents. The policy, however, does not mirror the discourse. Subsequently, the EU's identity is affected by the policy discourse. As Hansen puts it:

“The conceptualization of foreign policy as a discursive practice implies that policy and identity are seen as ontologically interlinked: it is only through the discursive enactment of foreign policy, or in Judith Butler's terms ‘performances,’ that identity comes into being, but this identity is at the same time constructed as the legitimization for the policy proposed. Identities are thus articulated as the reason why policies should be enacted, but they are also (re)produced through these very policy discourses: they are simultaneously (discursive) foundation and product. (2006, p. 19)

Likewise, Othering is an identity producing practice, which the EU applies in their security discourse. Security discourses embody “a dual political dynamic” (2006, p. 31). First of all, they provide the ones executing security policies “with the legitimate power to undertake decisive and otherwise exceptional actions”. At the same time, however, the discourse attributes the policy actors with a certain “responsibility for doing so”. In Hansen's words: “the construction of something as so threatening as to warrant decisive action is followed by a responsibility for answering those threats” (2006, p.31). In this way, if the EU discourse securitizes irregular migration, it also gives them a responsibility to react with (exceptional) measures.

### **3.2: Research Methods**

Because of Hansen's (2006) focus on policy discourse, considering the focus of this research is on EU policy responses, her framework is very useful. For this reason her framework is applied in this thesis. The intertextual model applied is the one focussing on official discourse of the EU as outlined by model 1 of Hansen's approach. Hansen states that official discourse should “be situated inside a larger intertextual web” (p. 53). In this way extra sources that can either support or reject the official discourse are included. For this reason, the analysis also includes academic literature. Furthermore, the discourse of one Self is analyzed: that of the EU. By analyzing three policy responses to irregular migration from the years 2013 until 2019, the temporal perspective becomes one of historical development. Through this type of

analysis the author hopes to trace changes, if there were any, in the EU discourse around irregular migration and migrant smuggling. As explained in the previous section, the number of events can be interpreted broadly. In this case, irregular migration is viewed as one event.

#### *Case selection, data selection & analysis*

In the analysis, official discourse of the EU is analyzed, including the policy response. Because it includes policy, documents that were selected correspond to the time frame of these policies: 2013-2019. For example, because the Lampedusa tragedy is the starting point of the analysis, the EU Commission's response to this is analyzed, including several statements leading up to the Mare Nostrum mission and from during the time of the mission. The documents include EU Commission and Council statements, in addition to reports and policy documents. To support the analysis, academic literature on the issue is also consulted. Securitization is at the center of this research, thus the analysis will concentrate on securitizing language. This includes words that indicate a threat or danger. Securitizing language can be explicit, however, because we are dealing with a government institution, the expectation is that the language use will be more subtle and implicit. Therefore, one has to read in between the lines. To provide a meaningful discussion, the analysis will not be limited to the EU's language alone, but also aims to include the implications of this language and the actions that came from it.

Mare Nostrum was an Italian initiative and because I do not speak Italian, any original policy documents could not be analyzed. Moreover, when translating texts from one language to the other, its original meaning can get lost in translation. Another reason for the minimal amount of documents on Mare Nostrum is that the duration of the Operation was significantly shorter than the other two operations. However, the lack of Mare Nostrum specific policy documents and reports is compensated by the analysis of general EU documents concerning irregular migration dating from that period and speeches and statements of EU officials. Even though Mare Nostrum was under the supervision of Italian Navy and the EU had no authority over the military mission in any way, adding the Operation to the analysis was a well considered decision. Mare Nostrum served as a catalyst for a European response to irregular migration and SAR activities in particular. In addition, the EU has always expressed their support for the Italian Navy in their SAR endeavor.

The analysis of Operation Triton mostly includes documents from 2014-2016. From 2015



onwards, Triton was deemed inadequate to deal with irregular migration by itself and subsequently Operation Sophia was initiated in order to complement Frontex Operation Triton. Moreover, documentation of Operation Triton after 2015 is limited, the launch of ENFM is a possible explanation for this.

There is an extensive amount of documentation and academic literature on ENFM, which is by far the largest operation of the three. When selecting the documents attention was paid to a variation of publication years, with the aim of having a somewhat equal representation of documents over the years the Operation was active. However, documentation after 2017 was limited, maybe due to the reason that the peak in migrant crossings had passed or because the operational difficulties ENFM was facing.

### *Limitations*

One of the main critiques on discourse analysis is the question of objectivity. Although a researcher is expected to be neutral in their analyses, total objectivity is impossible. This is especially true when it comes to analyzing language. A great deal of the analysis is based on the interpretation of language, thus there is a risk that the bias of the researcher is reflected in the results. This might become increasingly difficult when the discourse under analysis is not quite explicit, as is often the case in political discourse. Additionally, migration is a complex process with many dimensions. This in combination with the complexity of the missions makes it very difficult to address every important aspect within the scope of this thesis.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

The next chapter applies the methods discussed above to EU statements and documents concerning the three sea missions: Mare Nostrum, Triton and Sophia. Each one is examined in a separate chapter. In the beginning of each chapter a short overview of the mission is provided. Subsequently, the documents are analyzed and discussed while also considering academic literature.

### 4.1: Operation Mare Nostrum (October 2013 - October 2014): background and context

The Lampedusa tragedy of October 2013 was a wakeup call for many. Not because it was the first time an incident like this took place, but mainly because the amount of victims was beyond that of any of the similar accidents that had occurred before. This in addition to extensive media attention was a call for action for EU and Italian politicians.

On the 18th of October the same year, Italy launched Operation Mare Nostrum with a dual objective: first of all, to rescue migrants in distress at sea and secondly, “to combat organized crime and smugglers” (Panebianco, 2016, p. 13). Border-control was not at the heart of the mission, instead, as becomes evident from the analysis, the mission was created out of a “moral responsibility” to act on a “growing humanitarian crisis” (Patalano, 2015, p. 15). The operation covered around 70,000 sq. kilometers in the Strait of Sicily and saw several state and non-state actors working together including the Italian Navy, health care professionals and NGOs. Thus, it operated in international waters, including Libyan and Maltese coastal waters. The budget of 9 million euros per month was covered by Italy alone (ECRE, 2014). The EU did make a financial contribution of 1.8 million euros in total; however, considering the high monthly costs this amount was just a drop in the ocean. Only one other EU Member State contributed to the mission, despite Italy’s request for (financial) support from other Member States. Slovenia provided a naval vessel, *Tigrav*, to support Italy from the beginning of December 2013 until the end of January, 2014 (“*Triglav ship nearing end of mission*”, 2014). Eventually the costs became too high for Italy to cover and in combination with criticism from other EU Member States, such as the United Kingdom, this resulted in the shut down of the operation after around a year time, on the 31 of October 2014. One of the main critiques was that the SAR operation created a pull factor, creating incentive for migrants to make the journey across the Mediterranean because they knew Italian Navy ships would be there to intercept. However, this has not been proven to be true. Mare Nostrum saved the

lives of approximately 150,000 migrants and is responsible for the arrest of 366 alleged smugglers (“*Mare Nostrum* ”, n.d.).

#### **4.1.1: The EU discourse on irregular migration during the Mare Nostrum mission**

Irregular migration and migrant smuggling across the Mediterranean has been an issue in the EU for decades. In order to manage migration, several treaties, programs and action plans have been developed. The Stockholm Programme (2010-2014) was a multi-annual agenda that dealt with challenges to the AFSJ, such as migration, with the priority “to focus on the interests and needs of citizens” (17024/09, p. 3). Challenges discussed in the agenda included citizen’s rights, internal security and migration and asylum policy. The Programme was one of the steps towards the European Agenda on Migration. Although the document is not directly related to the Mare Nostrum operation, it provides an image of the EU’s general position towards irregular migration during that time.

One thing that immediately stands out is the use of the word ‘illegal’ instead of ‘irregular’. As explained earlier, the use of the word ‘illegal’ when referring to persons that move from one state to another outside the regulations and laws in place has implications for both the people and the organizations that aid them during their journey. However, in the 2013-2014 period, the criminalization of, for instance, NGOs that conducted SAR operations was not as common as it would become later. Criminalization and securitization are separate processes, however, in the context of migration in the EU these sometimes go hand in hand. Kržalić, Korajlić and Mesihović – Dinarević (2019), for example, discuss the securitization and criminalization of migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They argue that as a result of the securitization of migrants, by connecting migration to terrorism for instance, police officers were allowed to use criminalistic investigation methods when determining someone’s identity.

Chapter 4 of the Stockholm Programme, titled “a Europe that protects”, discusses how the EU can protect itself and its citizens from trans-national threats, such as organized crime, terrorism, drug trafficking and also the trafficking and smuggling of human beings (17024/09, p. 35). The trafficking and smuggling of persons is thus regarded as a ‘threat’ to the internal security of the Schengen area and “the European Council considers that [...] these types of crime deserve special priority in the years to come” (17024/09, p. 44).

However, when addressing this threat in the program, the focus is mainly on human trafficking. The smuggling of persons is mentioned once at the start of the section) and not mentioned again. Despite the conceptual overlap between trafficking and smuggling, in order to adequately address the issue it is important to be fully aware of its characteristics. It is to expect that the European Council is knowledgeable on human trafficking and smuggling and the features they share and do not share. However, from this section it seems that the Council uses the two concepts interchangeably, either indicating that according to them there is not much that differentiates the two, or that they prioritize human trafficking over human smuggling.

Chapter 6 of the Stockholm Programme, titled “A Europe of responsibility solidarity and partnership in migration and asylum matters”, discusses migration and asylum matters (17024/09, p. 59). A recurring topic is the request for solidarity among the Member States, not only in addressing migration issues, but also in tackling threats to the internal security of the EU, such as terrorism. At the time of writing the Stockholm Programme, the situation at the Southern borders was already becoming challenging. As a consequence, the Council uses the situation there as an example in their call for solidarity. In the same section they state the importance of preventing “the recurrence of tragedies at sea” (17024/09, p. 59). Later, when discussing “effective policies to combat illegal immigration” the Council stresses once more that their “aim must be to prevent human tragedies which result from the activities of traffickers” (17024/09, p. 66). This shows that the Council deems the traffickers to be responsible for the deaths at sea. The use of words such as ‘essential’ and ‘priority’ demonstrates the importance of the topic. Whereas the focus in Chapter 4 of the program was on human trafficking, the attention given to human trafficking and smuggling in Chapter 6 is distributed more evenly, granting them the same level of importance.

The Stockholm Programme provides a general view of the EU’s stance towards irregular migration and human smuggling during the time Mare Nostrum was operational. However, in the aftermath of the Lampedusa tragedy migration across the Mediterranean became an even hotter topic in the European Union. Although many people had attempted the crossing from Africa to Europe before 2013, their numbers were rising, as well as the number of people who did not survive the journey. Following his visitation to Lampedusa right after the tragedy, José Manuel Durão Barroso, the president of the European Commission at that time, made a statement addressed to the European Commission (Speech/13/792, 2013). The first

part of his statement centered around the human aspect of the tragedy. He talked about what he saw during his visit to Lampedusa, painting an image of loss and despair, stating: “That image of hundreds of coffins will never get out of my mind. [...] Coffins of babies, coffins with the mother and the child that was born just at that moment” (2013, p. 2). The words ‘refugee’ or ‘immigrant’ were not used here, instead he spoke about the people behind those labels. By repeating the word ‘coffins’ he emphasized the loss of life. In addition, he shared the emotions that he felt during those moments and when looking in the eyes of the survivors. By talking about his own experience and sharing his emotions, Barroso put himself next to the victims and survivors. It makes him look more vulnerable, but it also gives a sense of trust and credibility. Moreover, if people would have found it hard to relate to the victims, Barroso made it now easy to relate to him instead, building a bridge between the victims and the members of the EU Commission. In the eyes of the survivors, Barroso said, he saw desperation, but later also hope. He wanted the EU to give the victims reason to have hope. By saying this he took the responsibility to act on these events. Later in his statement, however, this decisive language weakened. For example, he said that an incident such as this one *should* never happen again and that “the Commission will do all it can [...] to *help* changing the situation” (2013, p. 2), whereas earlier Barroso stated the EU “cannot accept” people dying at its borders.

Solidarity and cooperation is also a prominent theme in Barroso’s statement, just as in the Stockholm Programme. For example, he referred to “the challenges that Lampedusa and Italy are facing” as “European challenges” (Speech/13/792, 2013, p. 2). In addition, Barroso believed that more can be achieved when Member States cooperate “showing also solidarity to those most exposed” (2013, p. 3). In the statement Barroso called for an increase in SAR capacity and reinforcement of EU “joint action against criminals and people smugglers”, while reminding the Commission that the people who died “were paying for smugglers to bring them in these unsafe conditions to Europe” (2013, p. 3). Here he made clear who he considered to be at fault for the loss of life. Moreover, he linked people smugglers to criminals.

Later that month followed a European Council meeting, after which president Barroso made another statement (Speech/13/858, 2013). According to Barroso, the discussion on illegal migration and refugees in Europe was the most substantial discussion during the European

Council meeting. His use of language aimed to create a sense of urgency by stating that “the scale of the human tragedy in the Mediterranean means we have to act now” (2013, p. 3). In addition, he believed that the Lampedusa tragedy had created “a sense of urgency that will make things happen” (2013, p. 3). During the Council meeting he called “for a stronger response of the European Union in several areas” (2013, p. 3). The first of those four areas mentioned is SAR operations to save lives. The fourth point mentioned is the “fights against organised crime and human trafficking”. Although it is highlighted that putting this last on the list does not mean it is of lesser importance, putting SAR first does, intentionally or unintentionally, lay emphasis on the EU’s humanitarian goals. Despite the EU’s constant call for solidarity and cooperation, Italy was mostly left to its own devices to deal with the growing migratory flow. The EU made a one time financial contribution of 1.8 million euros to the Mare Nostrum mission, a fifth of Italy’s monthly expenses. Considering the mission lasted 12 months, the EU paid an estimated 1,67 percent of the total amount of 108 million euros. (Memo/14/566, 2014).

Despite Italy’s repeated requests for aid, Member States were reluctant to contribute. The EU’s way of contributing to Italy’s mission of saving lives was the development of EUROSUR, the European Border Surveillance System. Barroso stated that EUROSUR is meant to prevent tragedies such as the Lampedusa disaster (Speech/13/792, 2013). The title of the memo on EUROSUR is: “EUROSUR: Protecting the Schengen external borders - protecting migrants’ lives” (Memo/13/1070, 2013).

Figure 2: EUROSUR



source: European Commission, n.d.

EUROSUR's purpose is that "it provides a common mechanism for near real time information exchange and interagency cooperation in the field of border surveillance" (Memo/13/1070, 2013). It is clear that EUROSUR is a border control initiative and does not contribute directly to Italy's SAR operation. Moreover, Member States can decide for themselves whether they act on the information they receive from EUROSUR (Europees grensbewakingssysteem (EurosUR), n.d.). Andersson argues that "satellite and communications systems such as EUROSUR" help "perpetuate the security response" (2016, p. 1061).

Italy's efforts, however, did not go unnoticed by the European Commission as becomes clear from Commissioner Malmström's statement from August 2014, following her meeting with the Italian Interior Minister of that time, Angelino Alfano. She expressed her gratitude towards Italy "for the immense work they have been doing during the Mare Nostrum operation", while also acknowledging how unsustainable the mission was for Italy (Statement/14/259, 2014, p. 1). During the meeting, Malmström and Alfano had discussed the future of the mission, including how the EU and Member States could become more involved in order to "manage the migration issue in the Mediterranean" (2014, p. 1). By saying this, she admitted that the EU had made no substantial contributions so far. Subsequently, Malmström explained the plan to merge Frontex operations Hermes and Aeneas into a "new and upgraded operation", a 'Frontex plus', with the aim "to complement what Italy has been doing" (2014, p. 1). From her wording around the new operation, it

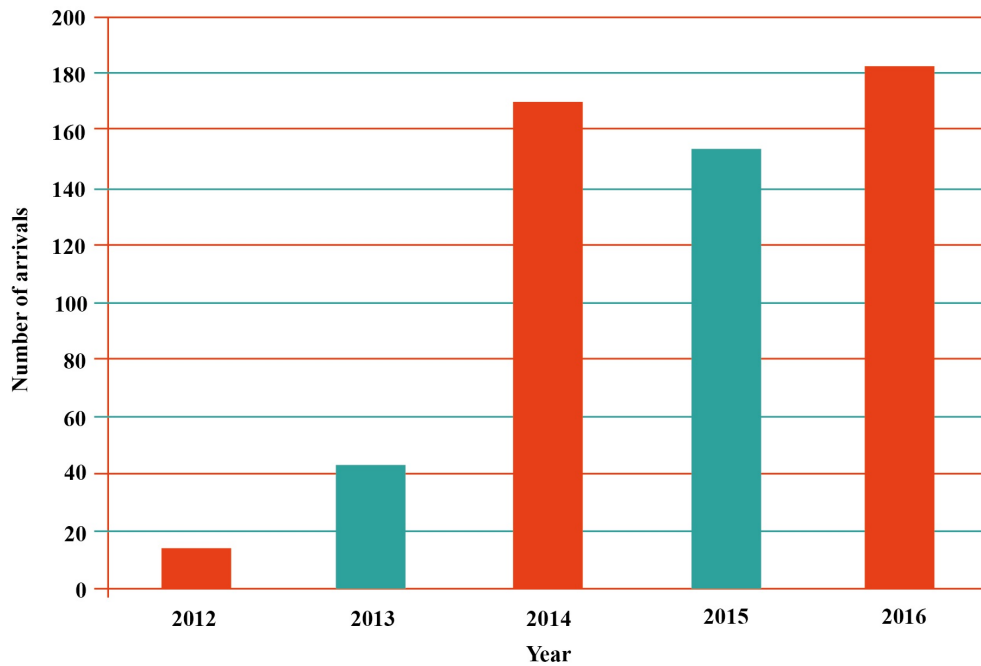
seemed that in the planning this operation was going to be bigger than Mare Nostrum. Moreover, it was supposed to “complement” Italy’s work. In addition, great emphasis was put on the importance of all Member States contributing to the new mission. Malmström even said she *expects* “all Member States to contribute”, either by offering technical assistance or guest officers. In her concluding remarks she referred back to the oral response of Member States after the occurrence of tragedies such as the Lampedusa incident. While all Member States expressed that they deeply regretted the loss of life, according to Malmström, “that solidarity now needs to be transformed into concrete action” (2014, p. 2). This indicates that Malmström herself was unsatisfied with the EU’s contribution to saving lives in the Mediterranean.

Despite Malmström her gratitude towards Italy for initiating and executing Mare Nostrum, not everyone regarded the mission as a success. The United Kingdom for example, did not support SAR missions in the Mediterranean, because they “believe that they create an unintended “pull factor”, encouraging more migrants to attempt the dangerous sea crossing” (House of Lords, 2014). In order to be more effective, the focus should be “on countries of origin and transit” and on fighting “the people smugglers who wilfully put lives at risk” (2014). Similarly, public opinion in Italy started moving in the same direction. The UK parliament shifts from the loss of life to the people who are, according to them, to blame for the unnecessary deaths of thousands of people. The idea that Mare Nostrum constituted a pull factor stemmed from the growing numbers of migrants crossing the Central Mediterranean.

*Figure 3: Irregular migration flows to Italy (after crossing the Central Mediterranean)*



### Irregular Arrivals in Italy (after crossing the Central Mediterranean)



source: European Commission, 2017

However, as Figure 3 shows, the number of arrivals had been increasing before the launch of Mare Nostrum and it continued to grow after the operation came to an end.

#### 4.1.2: Discussion

Following the Lampedusa tragedy, the EU's language was focused around solidarity, the loss of human lives and urgent calls for action. Although the analyzed documents do discuss the role of people smugglers to some extent, the greater focus is on a humanitarian approach to this crisis. Despite the EU being aware of its responsibility towards the people attempting the crossing and its repeated calls for action, the policy response does not follow the narrative put forward in the statements discussed above. However, it is legally defined that Member States are responsible for SAR in their territory so it is reasonable to ask to what extent the EU has to partake in sharing this burden. Nonetheless, as discussed in the methodology chapter, when the EU constructed the threat to migrants' lives and called for immediate action, this is logically "followed by a responsibility for answering these threats" (Hansen 2006, p. 31). EUROSUR is an example of the discrepancy between the EU's discourse and its action. While according to EU language its main priority was saving the lives of as many people as

possible, EUROSUR is a border-surveillance agency focussed on information exchange, border surveillance and the reinforcement of Frontex.

To answer the subquestion: How did the EU government frame irregular migration and migrant smuggling in particular?, the EU framed irregular migration and migrant smuggling as a threat to human lives, a threat that had to be addressed immediately. Nonetheless, what is important to keep in mind is that most of the statements analyzed are personal statements and that these, although the persons in question represent the EU, possibly do not reflect the opinion of all EU Member States. By incorporating the Stockholm Programme in the analysis, a more general EU frame was examined. In line with the personal statements, the Stockholm Programme prioritized preventing tragedies and saving human lives. Simultaneously, it applied terminology such as ‘illegal’ and ‘traffickers’ and ‘trafficking’ when speaking about migrants and smugglers. This type of language has implications for how irregular migrants and smugglers are perceived and consequently treated. Despite the construction of irregular migration and migrant smuggling as a threat to human lives and calls for immediate action the EU’s policy response, although possibly contributing to Member States’ efforts, did not convey this narrative. For instance, the issue was framed as a ‘European’ challenge. The response, however, was not very European but particularly Italian. This answers the second subquestion: to what extent is there a convergence between the frame and policy?

#### **4.2: Operation Triton (November 2014 - Februari 2018): background and context**

Instead of contributing to Operation Mare Nostrum, the EU set up a new operation, Operation Triton, that was supposed to run alongside Mare Nostrum. Operation Triton was initiated in November 2014 and lasted until Februari 2018. This is significantly longer than the operation previously discussed. One of the reasons is that it was a EU initiative. Whereas the funding of Mare Nostrum was solely carried by Italy, Triton received funding and other resources from 25 Member States (European Commission, n.d.). Although the Frontex joint mission is often described in the literature as the successor of Mare Nostrum, there was barely any continuation from the 2013-2014 operation into Triton. Moreover, the EU has explicitly stated, as mentioned in the previous section, that Triton was set up to aid Italy in their efforts and not to take over their SAR operation. It was Triton’s timing and “EU institutions’ strong rhetorical commitment to act upon maritime tragedies” that created the belief that the joint mission would replace Mare Nostrum (Cusumano, 2019, p. 9). Whereas Mare Nostrum was a

humanitarian mission, Triton focused on border control and lacked a search and rescue mandate. It was executed by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, and several EU Member States voluntarily contributed to the mission that was hosted by Italy. Compared to Mare Nostrum, Triton was ‘cheap’. With its budget of 2.9 million a month, its costs were 6.1 million lower than that of Mare Nostrum. However, in accordance with international law, vessels operating under the Triton mandate were of course obliged to rescue persons in distress. The area covered by Operation Triton was also way smaller than that of its predecessor, covering 30 nautical miles from the Italian and Maltese coast.

Figure 4: Area patrolled by Triton (green) before April 2015 compared to Mare Nostrum (red) and area where most SAR takes place (yellow)



source: “Setting foot on boats of death”, 2015.

In 2015, after receiving criticism for retreating the SAR assets and a relative increase in migrant deaths’ Triton’s budget was tripled and the operational area enlarged to 138 nautical miles South from the Sicilian shore (Speech/15/4896; “EU Operations in the Mediterranean”, 2016). That same year the EU created another Frontex mission to complement Triton’s efforts: EUNAVFOR Med Sophia.

#### 4.2.1: The EU discourse on irregular migration during Operation Triton

The plans for Operation Triton were already being developed during the summer of 2014. There were talks about merging Frontex operations Hermes and Aeneas and in October 2014 Operation Triton, a mission initially meant to complement the efforts of Mare Nostrum, came into existence (Statement/14/259, 2014).

In the spring of 2015, the EU developed the Action Plan against migrant smuggling, that set “out the specific actions necessary to implement” The European Agenda on Migration and The European Agenda on Security (COM(2015)285, p. 1). This is the first Action Plan concerning this particular problem, indicating that the issue had been gaining importance on the EU agenda. In the Action Plan a clear distinction is made between the smuggling of persons and human trafficking. Moreover, ‘irregular’ is used as an adjective where previously, as was the case in the Stockholm Programme, the word ‘illegal’ would have been deemed appropriate. Nonetheless, in a European Council statement from a year later again ‘illegal’ is used (EUCO 18/15). Similarly, the statement only speaks of ‘trafficking’ and ‘traffickers’ when addressing the situation in the Mediterranean. The Action Plan directs a great deal of attention towards the “ruthless criminal networks” that engage in migrant smuggling. For example, it states that “smugglers treat migrants as goods, similar to the drugs and firearms that they traffick along the same routes” (COM(2015)285, p. 1). This suggests that arm smugglers, drug smugglers and people smugglers are all one and the same. In addition, although this is not explicitly written, it gives the reader the idea that *they*, the smugglers, treat migrants badly, whereas *we*, the EU, would never. Smugglers are portrayed as highly organized, evil criminals who deliberately put people’s lives at risk in order to make substantial amounts of money. The linking of people smuggling to other crimes, such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling and even terrorism, helps to create this image. “Targeting smugglers as villains has reinforced this security trend by reinforcing ‘supply-side’ punitive policies rather than addressing demand“ (Andersson, 2016, p. 1061). Similar tactics were used during the ‘war on drugs’.

Research suggests, however, that it is not that simple as the EU puts it here. The relationship between the smuggler and the migrant, for instance, does not always fit the mold of the victim-predator dichotomy. Campana and Gelsthorpe’s (2020) research shows that both smugglers and migrants deploy strategies to overcome challenges such as low trust, asymmetrical information and illegality. Smugglers, for instance, sometimes choose to offer

some sort of guarantee to the migrant: “if the journey is not successful, migrants will be able to repeat it at no additional costs” (2020, p. 15). Another way to ensure smugglers keep their end of the bargain is for the migrant to gather information on the person to use as leverage. Their research also disputes the notion put forward in the Action Plan that all smugglers lie and that, in general, migrants are not aware of the risks of smuggling and the potential malicious intent of smugglers. Similarly, Achilli (2018) challenges the ‘all smugglers are villains’ narrative. During his field research along the Balkan route he discovered that “the relationship between the smugglers and the migrants appeared to be rich in solidarity and reciprocity and grounded in local notions of morality” (2018, p. 77). In addition, smugglers are often not as organized as the EU portrays them to be. Although there is some level of organization, most smugglers are not part of a greater criminal network. Demir, Sever and Kahya (2017) found that most smugglers they interviewed build their expertise in the smuggling business and stay away from other illicit activities. From the two-thirds of smugglers that had a criminal record, half of them had priors in the migrant smuggling business, one-third had committed some sort of petty crime and only 10 percent “were previously involved in narcotics” (Demir et al, 2017, 380). The remainder had “criminal cases in mugging, fraud and working with mafia-type organisations” (2017, p. 380). This raises the question whether CSDP missions to disrupt “migrant smuggling networks”, as proposed in the action plan, are an effective way to combat migrant smuggling. What does disrupting networks accomplish if they are not organized in networks? However, the villainization of smugglers does serve a purpose. By creating this ‘evil’ Other, the EU creates room to take measures against them that otherwise would not have been proportionate.

From reading the document it becomes clear that migrant smuggling is regarded as a ‘wicked problem’ succeeding the internal-external divide. There are multiple plans for cooperation between EU institutions and agencies and also between the EU and third countries. The action plan also calls for further development of the “monitoring of pre-frontier area for early identification of smugglers and prevention of irregular departures of migrants” (COM(2015)285, p.5). This in combination with the increasing cooperation with third countries shows that the EU is not just monitoring their borders, but expanding their borderlands for the goal of pre-emptive control of migration flows.

The fist talks about an EU supported mission to aid Italy in its efforts started during the

summer of 2014. In her speech, Malmström acknowledged that the migration issue in the central mediterranean was becoming a structural challenge, while illustrating what was happening just outside the EU's borders: "we have poverty, war, dictatorship and oppression very near the European border and many people run away from this and seek shelter in the European Union" (Statement/14/259, 2014, p. 1). In another speech concerning Operation Triton she used a sentence with a similar sentiment, referring to migrants as "desperate people [...] fleeing conflict and war" (statement/14/302, 2014). Both statements reflect a way of Othering. The first one creates the identity of a safe and fair Europe by painting the image of a scary exterior full of suffering. The latter does something similar; *they* are desperate people coming to *us* in Europe to find peace. Again, solidarity is an important theme as indicated by the statement: "The Mediterranean is a European sea and a European responsibility" However, following the constitution of the Mediterranean as a European Responsibility, when speaking about SAR in the region it is Italy's own responsibility to "manage the situation" (Memo/14/566).

In this same memo the role of Frontex and Frontex Operation Triton is discussed. Triton was never intended to take over the Mare Nostrum activities, on the contrary, it becomes clear from multiple statements that Triton was intended to complement and support Italy's work. For example, Malmström stated that "it is clear that the Triton operation cannot and will not replace Mare Nostrum" (Statement/14/302, 2014). However, considering the EU's humanitarianism from earlier statements about the Lampedusa tragedy and Mare Nostrum, it is somewhat curious that the EU does not view SAR as a European duty. Moreover, Triton being a Frontex operation means that, although of course complying with international and EU obligations, SAR is not part of the Operation's mandate. The memo clearly states that "Frontex is neither a search and rescue body nor does it take up the functions of a Rescue Coordination Centre" (Memo/14/566). In addition, the Frontex chief made clear that although "saving lives is always an absolute priority", "the Agency's mandate is to control borders, we do not do search and rescue, even if a border control mission often becomes search and rescue" ("*Refugee Council raises concerns*", 2014). The undesired consequence of Triton's limited SAR assets was a relative increase in migrant deaths between November 2014 and April 2015 as is shown below in Table 1.

*Table 1: Data on adverse sea outcomes (died and missing) standardized by 1000 attempted Sea crossings (periods: Mare Nostrum and Triton only)*

	Period	Arrivals to Italy and all rescued <sup>1</sup>	Total Died & Missing	Attempted sea crossings <sup>2</sup>	Died & Missing/1000 attempted Sea crossings <sup>3</sup>
<b>Mare Nostrum</b>	<b>Jan 14 - Oct 14</b>	<b>154073</b>	<b>3048</b>	<b>157121</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Triton-only</b>	<b>Nov 14 - April 14</b>	<b>42255</b>	<b>1730</b>	<b>43985</b>	<b>39</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes arrival in Italy and rescues/interceptions done by the Libyan Coast Guard

<sup>2</sup> Attempted sea crossings = Arrivals in Italy + Rescued by Libyan Coast Guard + Died and Missing

<sup>3</sup> Standardized using total attempted sea crossings during the respective periods (Total died and missing / arrivals+rescued by Libyan Coast Guard+died+missing\*1000)

*source: Arsenijevic, Manzi & Zachariah, 2017*

After almost half a year of debate about Operation Triton’s limited budget and operational area, the Commission decided to increase the budget to a total of 120 million euros, closing the gap with Mare Nostrum. Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission at that time, spoke about this in April 2015, admitting that “it was a serious mistake to bring the Mare Nostrum operation to an end” because “it cost human lives” (Speech/15/4896). In addition, he criticized leaving Italy on its own in the financing of Mare Nostrum to subsequently address the wrong claims about the limited geographical range of the Frontex mandate. He continued that the reason that Frontex does not conduct rescue operations in international waters is not a mandate issue, but a resource allocation problem. The idea behind tripling the operation’s financial resources was that it would increase the search and rescue possibilities; however, as mentioned in the previous section, most search and rescue operations by Mare Nostrum were conducted close to the coast of Libya. Thus allocating more financial resources would mean nothing if Triton’s operational area would remain to be hours removed from the Libyan coast, which it did, despite being enlarged to approximately 250 km South from Sicily (Amnesty International, 2015). While the EU continually states that their “immediate priority is to prevent more people from dying at sea” (EUCO 18/15), the format of their operations does not reflect their statements.

Juncker’s tone is pressing and somewhat angry at times, especially when speaking of European solidarity. He stated: “To be honest, I have had enough of poetry. I find the rhetoric

of concern attractive at first but not all the time. [...] Solidarity must be shared” (Speech/15/4896). Here he addressed an issue that surfaces time and time again: the Member States’ expressions of concern do not match their actions. He made an important observation about how public opinion influences EU policy making. With public opinion changing every few months, Juncker asked his colleagues to stand by their decisions, even when public opinion had turned the other direction. Sticking to decisions in policy making is important. First of all, the public may have insufficient knowledge on the issue and therefore have an uninformed opinion. This is both true before and after the implementation of a certain policy. In addition, by changing policies and decisions policy makers indirectly admit to making a mistake, which can result in them being perceived as incompetent by the public (Dur, 2001). Also, it is common sense that inaction and indecisiveness will never solve the issue.

Legal migration is a recurring subject in the EU documents and often the lack of options for legal migrations is regarded as a key component in the surge in irregular migration. Juncker states: “if we do not open the door, we should not be surprised when less fortunate people from across the planet try to break in through the window” and that “legal migration is part of the medium-term solution and so we have to act”. The lack of legal pathways to enter Europe is portrayed as an urgent matter to be addressed. This is also reflected in the literature that focuses on migrant-smuggler relationships. Achilli addresses the criminal image of smugglers in media reports and how the media “fail to account for the brutality caused by states’ efforts to enforce border controls” while simultaneously failing to recognize “the ability of smugglers to help people navigate the unequal geographies of mobility” (Achilli, 2018, p. 92). For “the majority of migrants” he spoke with, smugglers were not the exploitative criminals from EU media and politics, on the contrary, their criticism was directed towards the EU for failing “to live up to the moral and humanitarian ideals it claims to champion”. For them smugglers offered a very much needed opportunity to circumvent the deep-rooted flaws in the EU system (2018, p. 83). This example perfectly illustrates what Junckers means with having to open the door. However, in the European Council Statement, legal pathways to enter Europe are not mentioned in the section on ‘preventing illegal migration flows’. Instead, the focus is on border control measures and cooperation with third countries. (EUCO 18/15, p. 2).



#### **4.2.2: Discussion**

The EU's narrative did not change significantly compared to the Mare Nostrum period. Saving lives at sea was still at the center and there were continuous calls for more solidarity from EU Member States. The EU documents such as the Action Plan and the Special Meeting Statement show no continuity when it comes to using terms such as 'illegal', 'irregular', 'trafficking' and 'smuggling'. When trying to combat an issue it is important to use the right terminology, especially when it concerns something as complicated and 'wicked' as the smuggling of people. Something that is especially interesting in the context of securitization is how the EU portrays migrant smugglers and smuggler networks. According to the EU institutions migrant smugglers are part of highly organized networks that not only are involved in people smuggling, but also in other serious crimes such as the smuggling of arms, drug trafficking and terrorism. The literature, however, says otherwise. However, creating an image of smugglers as dangerous criminals involved in greatly organized criminal networks places them in a security framework.

To sum up, the EU government continues to frame irregular migration and migrant smuggling as a threat to human lives in the timeframe of Operation Triton. At the same time, however, by constructing the image of the 'evil' smuggler the EU creates a justification for a more security based approach. This illustrates an argument made by Jumbert (2018). She states that Frontex, among other security organizations, "has sought to re-frame its border security interventions as tools to save lives, in addition to being measures to control the borders" (2018, 114). Although Operation Triton still does not mirror the EU's humanitarian outlook, the criminalization of smugglers closes the gap between EU discourse and the border control mandate of Triton to some extent.

#### **4.3: Operation Sophia (EUNAVFOR MED Sophia)(June 2015 - March 2020): background and context**

Out of the three operations, Operation Sophia has been the one that was most widely discussed in the academic literature, but also in the popular media. In the timeframe, Triton and Sophia have a few years of overlap; Operation Sophia launched on June 22, 2015. From Mare Nostrum to Sophia, the focus has shifted from search and rescue to the combating of human smuggling networks in the Mediterranean, which is viewed by the EU institutions as

one of the biggest contributors to the humanitarian crisis on the Mediterranean Sea. Twenty-six Member States contributed to the operation.

At the start of the mission, Sophia “consisted of four different phases”. The first one was tracing smuggling networks and their activity and methods. The second phase consisted of “boarding, search, seizure and diversion on the high seas of vessels suspected of being used for human smuggling”. This is stage one of phase 2. The second stage is an expansion of this to execute these same actions in the “coastal states territory” with the consent of that State (operationsophia.eu, n.d.). Phase 3 takes these activities another step further; “up to including taking operational measures against vessels and related assets suspected of being used for human smuggling or trafficking inside the coastal states’ territory”. The final and fourth phase concerns the completion of the mission and the withdrawal of forces. In 2016 EUNAVFOR Med (ENFM) Sophia received additional tasks: “training of the Libyan Coastguards and Navy” and “to contribute to the implementation the UN arms embargo on the high seas off the coast of Libya” (operationsophia.eu, n.d.). In 2017 the EU Council gave Operation Sophia additional supporting tasks, relating to the training of the Libyan Coastguard and Navy, surveillance and information gathering “on illegal trafficking of oil exports from Libya” and the sharing of “information on human trafficking with Member States law enforcement agencies, Frontex and EUROPOL” (operationsophia.eu, n.d.). In sum, the tasks of ENFM were addressing multiple issues affecting the Mediterranean. Logically, since this thesis deals with irregular migration, the analysis focuses solely on the components relating to migrant smuggling and irregular migration.

#### **4.3.1: The EU discourse on irregular migration during EUNAVFOR Med Sophia**

After increasing critiques on the EU efforts, or lack thereof, to tackle the migrant issue in the Central Mediterranean, the European Council discussed possibilities to complement Operation Triton during a special Council meeting on April 23, 2015. The Council Decision (8740/15) describes on what grounds ENFM was built, including its mandate, mission and planning. The Council Decision refers to the situation in the Mediterranean as “the *crisis* of migrants”. Moreover, the operation is developed “in the framework of the Union's Common Security and Defence Policy”. Also, “the need for the Union to work with the support of the UN Security Council” was expressed. The word ‘crisis’ carries a message of insecurity. Calling something a crisis indicates that the situation may have dire consequences for the status quo. Additionally, already through the involvement of the UN Security Council

and Sophia being part of the EU CSDP, migrant smuggling and irregular migration become security concerns. Furthermore, ENFM is described as “a military crisis management operation contributing to the disruption of the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Southern Central Mediterranean” (8740/15, p. 5). Military force is heavily connected to the notion of state security. Sophia being a military operation pushes it further into the security realm. Thus, it is not too early to conclude that ENFM Sophia in its essence reflects irregular migration as a security issue. Nonetheless, analyzing the narrative around irregular migration within texts related to Operation Sophia is still valuable as it offers more insight into the relationship between the securitizing speech acts, the policy and their implications.

On the first page the EU states its core message: that its “immediate priority is to prevent more people from dying at sea” (8740/15, p. 1). Likewise, the need to reinforce internal responsibility and solidarity is again mentioned as a first concern. Interestingly, the first point uses the smuggler terminology to introduce the goal of the operation, whereas the third point suddenly speaks of fighting ‘the traffickers’. From that point on, ‘smuggling’ and ‘trafficking’ both reappear in the text. Although in the case of Operation Sophia the use of both words makes sense because the mandate includes smuggling and trafficking, it is still important to continue to make the distinction.

The operation received its name a few months after its initial kickoff in September 2015. ENFM was renamed “Sophia”, “after the name given to the baby born on the ship of the operation which rescued her mother on 22 August 2015 off the coast of Libya” (Press Release 678/15). A newborn has its whole life in front of him or her; it symbolizes (new) life, a prospective future and also hope for that new future. Commissioner Federica Mogherini explained the message the EU aims to express by naming the operation after the baby. Using the name Sophia was

“to honour the lives of the people we are saving, the lives of people we want to protect, and to pass the message to the world that fighting the smugglers and the criminal networks is a way of protecting human life” (operationsophia.eu, n.d.).

Once again saving the lives of the people that became the ‘victims’ of smugglers is put as the mission’s main objective. I put the word ‘victim’ between quotation marks because the relationship between smugglers and migrants that use their service does in reality not reflect the binary divide the EU holds onto, as earlier discussed in the Operation Triton section. The statement also aimed to convey that focusing on criminal smuggler networks is a legitimate and logical method to save migrants’ lives instead of directly saving them through SAR. Although ENFM did engage in SAR operations, it was a secondary effort only conducted in international waters and not within Libya’s territorial waters. A possible explanation for not prioritizing SAR is that the SAR Convention declares that it is the States’ responsibility “to participate in the development of SAR services” to guarantee that persons in distress at sea are rendered assistance (Ghezelbash, Moreno-Lax, Klein and Opeskin, 2018, p. 321). The oceans on our earth are divided in different SAR zones, so is the Mediterranean. Libya, however, “has never officially declared a SAR zone or deposited information about its SAR services with the International Maritime Organization” (2018, p. 321). Moreover, although Frontex operations are supposed to complement the individual Member State’s efforts, the EU Coastguard takes “a leading role in initiating and approving joint activities, and in their planning, deployment, and strategic evaluation”. As a result it becomes unclear whether the EU or the Member State is responsible. This makes it more difficult to establish who has to be held accountable in cases of misconduct (Ghezelbash et al., 2018). “A co-dependency emerges between the EU Coastguard and the Member States, with the former translating the ambitions of the latter into operational detail—the whole focus thus remaining on border security, rather than on SAR at sea” (2018, p. 324).

NGOs have tried to fill the lack of EU SAR operations by carrying out rescue operations close to the Libyan coast. However, the EU made this increasingly difficult for humanitarian actors to do this by constructing a criminalizing narrative about them. Frontex accused them of cooperating with human smuggling networks. In particular, they blamed the proximity of NGO vessels to the Libyan coast for causing smugglers to resort to cheaper, less seaworthy vessels to put migrants on and thus endangering migrants’ lives. In its report on the first half of 2016, it states that “Smugglers are relying on an increasing number of NGO rescue vessels that are operating close to, and sometimes within, Libyan territorial waters while ENFM maintained a deterrence effect on the high seas” (EEAS (2016) 126, p. 3). In this context, it was ENFM which kept migrant smugglers from entering international waters, while NGOs made it easy for them to still carry out their work, thereby creating a ‘pull-factor’. As

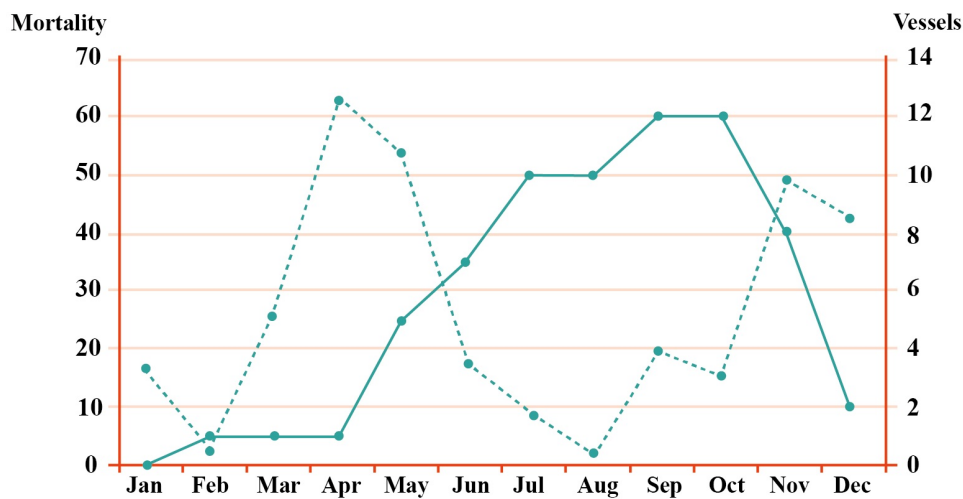
Cusumano and Villa state: “the same suspicions that had been levelled against Mare Nostrum turned into off-the-shelf accusations to be used against non-governmental rescue assets” (2021, p. 28). In addition, the report states that

“Whereas initially smugglers used large numbers of powered rubber boats enabling the transport of a maximum number of migrants up to the limit of territorial waters, the new modus operandi entails a skiff towing a rubber boat without an engine, which is then left adrift. This relies on the availability of NGOs, and sometimes merchant vessels, to carry out the rescue” (EEAS(2016) 126, p. 7).

Here it is the availability of NGO vessels that creates the opportunity for smugglers to use cheaper, more dangerous equipment and thus putting migrants’ lives at risk. However, one of the ENFMs methods to fight smugglers is to dispose of their vessels. Logically, smugglers adapted in order to keep their business profitable. The situation in Libya and the emergence of “a new model of militia-led smuggling” also contributed to this development (Heller and Pezzani, 2017). Additionally, research shows that more deaths occur in the absence of NGO SAR operations.

Figure 5: Migrant deaths and SAR NGO vessels (2016)

### The life-saving role of Search and Rescue NGOs

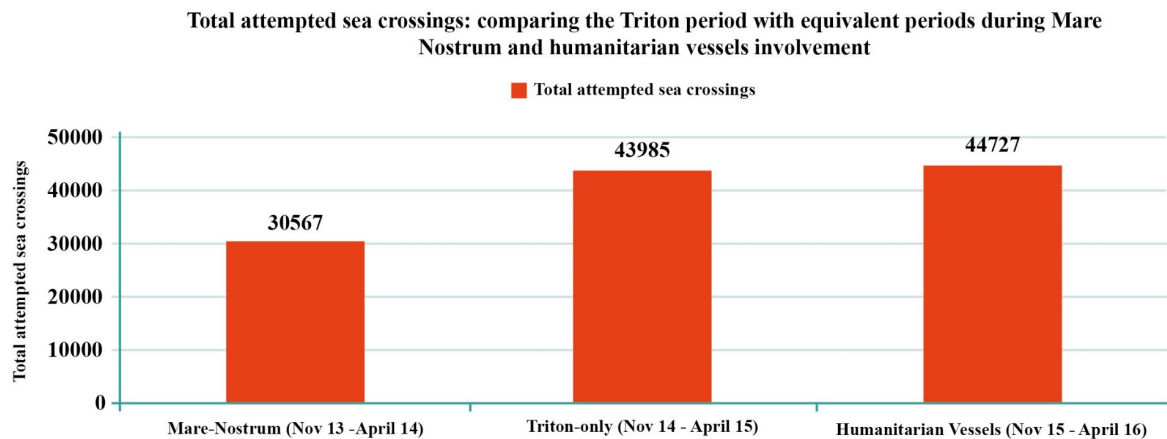


Migrant mortality rate (---) and SAR NGO vessels (—) in central Mediterranean, 2016.

source: “Blaming the Rescuers” report, 2017

While Frontex constructs NGOs conducting SAR as a ‘pull-factor’, the report argues that ENFM “has not contributed to the flow of migrants as “push factors” are in the countries of origin” (EEAS (2016) 126, p. 7). Stating that the migrant flow is caused by push factors in origin countries contradicts the idea that NGOs constitute a pull-factor. Data on the amount of attempted crossings also disputes the notion that increasing NGO SAR activity results in more crossings. Figure 6 shows the attempted crossings during the periods of Mare Nostrum, Triton-only and NGO involvement during Operation Sophia. In the case that SAR does constitute a pull-factor, expected is that attempted crossings during the first and the third period would be higher than during the time when only Operation Triton was active. However, this is not the case.

Figure 6: Total attempted sea crossings: Mare Nostrum, Triton only and Humanitarian vessels involvement compared



*source: Arsenijevic, Manzi and Zachariah, 2017*

Another task that was added to the ENFM’s mandate in 2016 was the training of the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy. The main justification for this action was mentioned in the Frontex rapport: “The capability and capacity of the Libyan Coastguard to protect their borders needs to be developed and therefore preventing illegal migration from Libyan shores, so that we can reach the end state of the mission where illegal migration is at a manageable level without the need for EUNAVFOR Med” (EEAS(2016) 126, p. 20). The goal was thus, that eventually Libya would take over the ENFM efforts in order to tackle illegal migration to Europe at its roots. The following years cooperation with Libya remained important and the EU’s humanitarian narrative continued.

The Joint Communication on migration on the Central Mediterranean route from January 2017 states that “the EU maintains its humanitarian imperative to save lives at sea” and that “close operational cooperation through the provision of training and assets with a strengthened Libyan Coast Guard could maximise the number of lives saved, increase the chance to intercept and stop smugglers and mitigate any unintended consequences”(JOIN(2017) 4 final, p. 6). Again, saving lives is the objective that is mentioned first. In the long run, the goal of the EU-Libya partnership was to build “the capacity of the Libyan Coast Guard [...] to a situation whereby the Libyan authorities can designate a search and rescue area in full conformity with international obligations” (JOIN(2017) 4 final, p. 7). In short, the EU framed the training of the Libyan Coastguard and Navy as a means to save the lives of (more) migrants attempting to reach Europe by sea.

Besides the training of the Libyan Coastguard and Navy, the cooperation was also accompanied by data and information sharing. Data such as the location of refugee boats were shared with Libya, resulting in pullbacks and the prevention of boats carrying migrants leaving the Libyan coast at all. These “measures raise severe concerns with respect to the right to leave any country” (Radjenovic, 2021, p. 3). Moreover, the Joint Communication outlines the EU’s goal for Libya to “designate a search and rescue area in full conformity with international obligations” (JOIN(2017) 4 final, p. 7). However, the International Criminal Court has started an investigation into the Libyan Coast Guard on allegations of “migrant interdiction rather than SAR, repeatedly hindering NGO rescue operations and using violence against migrants” (Cusumano, 2019, p. 14). Migrants that are taken back by Libya are often placed in ‘detention centres’. Moreover, Libya had a questionable human rights reputation even before the start of ENFM. In the Netherlands, for example, Libya is not on the list of safe countries of origin (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020).

#### **4.3.2: Discussion**

The humanitarianism frame continued to be paramount in EU discourse on irregular migration in the timeframe of Operation Sophia. I would argue, however, that Operation Sophia is a clear indication of the securitization of irregular migration in the EU. It is a military mission that fell within the scope of the CSDP and sought help from the UN Security Council. Moreover, in situations that threaten security, extraordinary measures are allowed. The cooperation with Libya, a country infamous for its human rights violations, is an example of such an extraordinary measure. At the same time their partnership with Libya contradicts the EU discourse of ‘saving lives’. The criminalization of NGOs and the training of the Libyan Coastguard and Navy makes one question the motives of the EU. If Libya is well trained it possibly results in ‘pull-backs’ from their side, thus preventing migrants from even leaving the African coast. In the same manner, limiting SAR operations by NGOs in Libyan territorial waters will have the same effect: migrants will not arrive in Europe. The discourse continuously connects migrant smugglers to bigger criminal networks, making them part of a greater threat to the European Union; organized crime. Sophia aimed to dismantle these organized networks, however, failed to do so because of the high adaptability of smugglers (EEAS(2016) 126). In addition the focus on combating networks fails to recognize the mechanism they depend on: supply and demand. If the lack of legal pathways



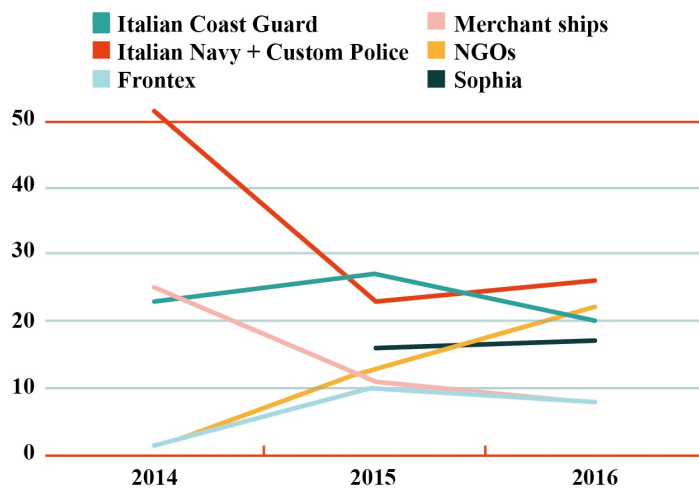
continues and the issues that forces people to leave their country are not addressed adequately, the demand for smugglers will remain.

In sum, the EU framed irregular migration and migrant smuggling during Operation Sophia as a humanitarian crisis. Simultaneously, the EU continues to speak of ‘illegal migration’ instead of ‘irregular migration’, thereby criminalizing irregular migrants. Additionally, although Operation Sophia did carry out SAR operations, the humanitarian frame in the EU discourse is too prominent in comparison to the results of the mission and the actions that were taken to achieve these results. The same is true for Operation Triton. As shown by figure 7 Frontex SAR operations constituted only a small chunk of the total amount of SAR missions.

Figure 7: SAR operations by agency/ship operator (2014-2016)

### Search and rescue operations by agency/ship operator, 2014-2016

in percentage



source: European Commission, 2017

## **Chapter 5: Answering the research question**

Through the analysis it has become evident that irregular migration constitutes a ‘wicked problem’ that is often perceived and constructed as a threat. The transboundary nature of migration asks for an approach outside of the internal-external security divide. An apparent example of such an approach is Operation Sophia, which externalized its policy through cooperation with Libya for example. To answer the research question concisely; the EU’s framing of irregular migration across the Central Mediterranean between 2013 and 2019 does show a process of securitization. The sub questions discussed after the analyses show that the frame the EU created is quite persistent throughout the years. From 2013 to 2019, the EU discourse clinged to its humanitarian values. However, as discussed in the theoretical framework, securitization does not necessarily only occur through speech acts; policies can be instrumental in creating a security discourse. Through its policies’ focus on border control, the EU created a security rationale around irregular migration. Thus, the EU aimed to securitize irregular migration both through its political discourse and its policies. Whereas the securitization through speech acts was mainly focused on human security, humanitarianism and the threat to human lives, its policies reflected a more traditional notion of security by focusing on the protection of EU borders.

### **5.1: Securitization in the EU discourse on irregular migration and migrant smuggling**

Now to answer the research question in a more elaborate manner, the following section discusses *how* the EU attempted to securitize irregular migration and migrant smuggling through its discourse. The main observation made in this research is that throughout the different missions the EU discourse was centered around strong humanitarian language. Although this narrative does not use ‘security talk’ as much, I argue that this discourse is a securitization move disguised as humanitarianism. In addition to securitizing moves, this section also addresses other themes in the EU discourse on irregular migration.

#### **5.1.1: Othering**

For the sake of protecting human lives, the EU created the Other in the form of the ‘evil’ smuggler. This was done in a direct manner, however, the use of wrong terminology has indirectly and maybe (un)intentionally contributed to the creation of this image. For instance, referring to smugglers as traffickers moves them (terminology wise) closer to organized crime and criminal networks that are involved in sex or drug trafficking. In addition, trafficking is linked with exploitation and harm. By doing this the EU disregards that there

are smugglers who act out of a moral responsibility and portrays smugglers as criminals with no moral compass. Since traffickers harm their victims more often than smugglers harm their customers, traffickers constitute a greater threat to irregular migrants. Of course this image may apply to some smugglers, but it undermines the complexity of the issue and of human beings alike. Nonetheless, it did serve the EU's securitization attempt.

The EU has 'Othered' irregular migrants in a similar fashion, although migrants were not portrayed as the enemy. Instead, they were made to look like the ultimate victims of smuggling networks, which in turn supported the image of the 'evil' smuggler. For instance, according to the documents analyzed, irregular migrants were not aware of the risk of making use of a smuggler's services. Moreover, they were portrayed as desperate people relying on the EU to give them hope and aid.

### **5.1.2: EU solidarity and cooperation**

The lack of cooperation and solidarity between EU Member States is an issue that continues to make EU policy making difficult. One of the questions that arose after completing this research was whether the lack of solidarity possibly contributed to the divergence between the EU discourse and its policy. In order for the EU to make good policies, increasing cooperation and solidarity among Member States is important. This is, however, a challenge; how to build solidarity among States who do not share the same history, culture and sometimes values? Today's 'European identity' is built on the EU values such as freedom, human rights and democracy. However, as this research demonstrates, this is not enough for Member States to feel a responsibility towards one another. Maybe over the span of many years a shared 'European identity' can be created, but it has to go deeper than the EU values because those, it seems, are not enough.

### **5.2: Securitization in EU policy directed towards irregular migration and migrant smuggling**

In addition to EU discourse, EU policy also showed a process of securitization from 2013-2019. Whereas the discourse in the documents does not change much during the timeframe, the policies show an increasing level of border management and surveillance.

The lack of action during Mare Nostrum shows that, although the EU securitized irregular migration through its humanitarian frame, the EU was not taking responsibility as a securitizing actor. The development of EUROSUR was the only substantial contribution the EU made during the Mare Nostrum period, but with its focus on surveillance and border control it did not contribute directly to the EU's goal as expressed in their discourse: saving lives. Similarly, in the first months of Operation Triton migrant deaths along the Central Mediterranean route increased because of the limited resources dedicated to SAR, while the focus in the discourse remained the same. After 2015 SAR increased during Operation Triton and Operation Sophia, but this was also because of the involvement of NGOs. To conclude, the EU's policy instruments meant to tackle irregular migration and to save lives are mostly focused on deterrence and border management and less on saving lives.

### **5.3: Recommendations**

This research demonstrates that the EU aimed to securitize irregular migration and migrant smuggling in the Central Mediterranean from 2013-2019. On the basis of this research, however, it is not possible to conclude whether this attempt has failed or succeeded. In order to do that more research is needed that also includes other actors, such as the public and media, in accordance with Hansen's second model. Additionally, taking a longer time frame might make it easier to spot. To address the lack of solidarity among Member States, an option would be to apply Hansen's (2006) 'multiple Self' model in order to analyze the policy discourse on irregular migration from different EU Member States, to search for common grounds and to move towards more solidarity and cooperation.

To conclude, migration is a structural phenomenon and will thus continue to exist. Being completely aware of this fact means that there will not be a solution to the 'problem' of people coming to Europe. Creating legal pathways is necessary, however, we might be in greater need of a way to deconstruct irregular migration as a threat and reconstruct how refugees and migrants are perceived by a great number of EU citizens. Since security is a social practice, we should be able to construct it in such a way that EU citizens and refugees and migrants can enjoy security together, instead of separate from or at the expense of one another.



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