ESSAY

Policing Migration in the Mediterranean

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ABSTRACT  Over recent years, there has been growing concern in European countries with irregular migration and other – supposedly related – transnational challenges from across the Mediterranean, which have come to be seen both as a security risk as well as a humanitarian challenge. In response, European countries have been stepping up their efforts to police their Mediterranean borders. This has involved both an increasing militarization of migration control in the Mediterranean, in the sense of the deployment of semi-military and military forces and hardware in the prevention of migration by sea, and an intensification of law enforcement co-operation between the countries north and south of the Mediterranean. This article discusses the evolution of these policing activities in and across the Mediterranean, as well as some of its perverse side effects, such as the growing involvement of human smugglers, and the diversion of the migratory flows towards other, usually further and more dangerous, routes across the Mediterranean sea.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a growing concern in Europe with irregular migration across the Mediterranean. On the one hand, illegal immigration, as has been pointed out by a number of analysts has increasingly come to be viewed as a security or strategic risk in many if not all European countries. In particular by virtue of its association with human smuggling and trafficking as well as other forms of cross-border organized crime, it is seen as a threat not only to national welfare systems and cultural or national identities but also to domestic peace and stability (Wæver et al., 1993; Bigo, 2000; Huysmans, 2000). In the aftermath of 9/11 and the Madrid bombings of 11 March 2003, these concerns have been further accentuated, as immigration in particular from the south has also increasingly been linked to international and especially Islamist terrorism (IISS, 2004: 151–5). On the other hand, clandestine migration across the Mediterranean has also come to be seen as a serious humanitarian challenge, given the ever rising death toll of would-be immigrants seeking to reach Europe by sea (Pugh, 2001).
One consequence of this growing preoccupation in European countries with irregular migration and (supposedly) related transnational challenges from across the Mediterranean has been a considerable expansion and intensification of policing and law enforcement activities in and across the Mediterranean sea. As this article will discuss, this has involved both an increasing deployment and upgrading of various types of security forces involved in policing the Mediterranean, as well as a considerable deepening of law enforcement co-operation between countries north and south of the Mediterranean. Somewhat surprisingly, though, not much attention has thus far been paid to these policing efforts in and across the Mediterranean.\(^1\) Thus, while since the beginning of the 1990s there has been a burgeoning literature on ‘Mediterranean security’ and the various security challenges that have come to affect the region, the law enforcement or policing aspect of the Mediterranean security agenda has thus far been largely neglected. Similarly, even though there have been some analyses on irregular migration and human smuggling across the Mediterranean, the policing efforts adopted in response to the growing concern with these challenges, as well as the ways in which these measures have themselves shaped the migratory patterns in the Mediterranean, have been given only scant treatment.\(^2\)

This relative neglect stands in contrast to the considerable body of analyses which now exist on the policing of irregular immigration and cross-border crime in a similar North-South context, namely the US-Mexico border. A number of authors have, for instance, analysed the intensification of policing along the US-Mexico border over recent years and decades, which has been driven by a growing concern in the USA with narcotics trafficking and illegal migration from Mexico across the US southern borders. One important theme, at least in the critical literature on this topic, has been the increasing ‘militarization’ of migration and narcotics control along the US-Mexico border: as drug trafficking and undocumented immigration from and through Mexico have come to be framed as a ‘national security threat’ to the USA, increasing resort has been made both to military-style technology as well as military personnel in securing the border – a development often decried by human rights and immigrant support groups as seriously jeopardizing the rights and safety of those seeking to enter (Dunn, 1996, 2001; Amnesty International, 1998).

Other critical analyses in this context have also pointed to the unintended and indeed often perverse side effects of enhanced policing efforts along the US-Mexico border. Peter Andreas, for example, has argued that the continuous upgrading of the US-Mexico border over recent years, while not having had any discernible impact on the overall inflow of undocumented immigrants into the USA, seems to have had the main – largely unwanted – effects of diverting the flows of migrants towards other and less heavily guarded parts of the border, as well as to foster the sophistication of the migrant smugglers. These unintended effects, in turn, have typically provided the rationale for further measures to upgrade the border, thus setting in motion an escalatory dynamic between the state border control forces and the illicit border crossers (Andreas, 1999, 2000).

Following these analyses of policing along the US-Mexico border, this article provides an overview of the evolution and expansion of policing activities along
and across the European Union’s (EU’s) Mediterranean borders, as they have been prompted by a growing concern – mainly on the part of the countries north of the Mediterranean – with cross-border challenges such as clandestine migration and people smuggling from the south. The essay is structured as follows. The first section briefly discusses the evolution of irregular migration and human smuggling across the traditionally most important ‘entry points’ along the EU southern borders – the Straits of Otranto and the Straits of Gibraltar – highlighting both the perceived security and humanitarian aspects of clandestine migration. Subsequent sections examine the policing efforts of southern European countries along their Mediterranean borders in response to the growth in undocumented immigration and related challenges from the south. In this regard, the analysis points to similar trends of ‘border militarization’ as they have been highlighted by analysts of the US-Mexico border, as well as to a considerable intensification of law enforcement or police co-operation between the countries north and south of the Mediterranean in preventing irregular migration and cross-border crime. In the last section, the article discusses some of the unwanted and negative side effects of these efforts to secure the EU’s Mediterranean borders, namely the growing involvement of human smugglers, and the diversion of the migratory flows towards other – usually further and more dangerous – routes across the Mediterranean sea.

Irregular Migration across the Mediterranean: Between Security Risk and Humanitarian Challenge

While clandestine immigrants enter Europe or the EU in a number of ways – by land, air and sea – the Mediterranean is nowadays considered one of the most important gateways through which undocumented immigrants seek to reach the EU (Europol, 2005). Needless to say that given its clandestine nature, the magnitude of the phenomena is difficult to assess, the only available data being border apprehensions of would-be immigrants. In 2002, a total of some 35,000 undocumented immigrants were intercepted by Greek, Italian and Spanish authorities along these countries’ southern borders. Based on these border apprehensions, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) has estimated that some 100,000 to 120,000 irregular migrants cross the Mediterranean each year, with about 35,000 coming from sub-Saharan Africa, 55,000 from the south and east Mediterranean, and 30,000 from other (mainly Asian and Middle Eastern) countries (ICMPD, 2004: 8). Typically, clandestine immigrants travel in unseaworthy and overloaded boats across the Mediterranean sea.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the two most important ‘entry gates’ along the EU’s southern maritime borders, which are also the shortest routes to cross the Mediterranean sea from the south, have been the Straits of Otranto and the Straits of Gibraltar. In both of these channels, irregular immigration has also increasingly come to be viewed as an issue of human smuggling and trafficking and thus as closely linked to organized cross-border crime.

Throughout the 1990s, the Straits of Otranto, where Italy’s Adriatic coast and Albania are separated by a mere 70 km, and which in good weather conditions
can be easily crossed even with a small boat, was considered the main ‘hot spot’ of irregular immigration into the EU. Initially, European countries were concerned mainly with emigration from Albania itself, which during the two crises that gripped the country in 1991 and 1997 reached rather dramatic proportions: in 1991, when Albania’s Communist regime fell, more than 50,000 Albanians crossed the Adriatic towards Italy in two successive waves, and in 1997, when the so-called pyramid investment schemes collapsed, some 30,000 Albanian would-be immigrants landed on Italy’s shores (Pastore, 1998; Piperno, 2002).

Towards the end of the 1990s, in addition to being a source country of westbound migration, Albania also became a major transit point for would-be immigrants seeking to reach Europe from further east and south, such as Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan or China. Moreover, migration across the Adriatic has increasingly come to be seen as a problem not only of illegal immigration as such but also of human smuggling and organized crime. As has been pointed out by several analyses, over the 1990s, the transport of would-be migrants from Albania to Italy has become increasingly organized by Albanian smuggling gangs, which are linked to larger trafficking networks operating at the international level (CENSIS, 1999; HLWG, 2000: 14; Barnett, 2004; Monzini et al., 2004: 52–6).

Among Italian law enforcement agencies it has also become common to assume relatively close linkages between irregular migration and human trafficking on the one hand, and other smuggling operations such as trafficking in drugs, arms or illegal cigarettes, on the other, even though analysts have also questioned these assumptions, pointing to the different channels used for these various trafficking businesses (Monzini et al., 2004: 56). Nevertheless, in Italy – and to a certain extent also in other European countries – these smuggling activities in the Adriatic have been identified as one of the most serious challenges to the country’s security, with the ‘Albanian Mafia’ increasingly surpassing the country’s own home-grown mafia. As suggested, for example, by Cataldo Motta, Italy’s top anti-Mafia prosecutor: ‘Albanian organized crime has become a point of reference for all criminal activity today. Everything passes via the Albanians. The road for drugs, arms and people, meaning illegal immigrants, is in Albanian hands’ (quoted in BBC News, 2000).

The other main ‘hotspot’ of undocumented immigration into Europe from the south since the early 1990s has been the Straits of Gibraltar, where the distance between Spain and Morocco is much shorter even than between Italy and Albania, amounting to a mere 14 km. While Spain has not been experiencing the kind of sudden and massive arrivals of would-be immigrants as Italy has, the number of undocumented migrants apprehended by Spanish authorities along the country’s Mediterranean coast nevertheless increased continuously over the 1990s. As can be seen from Table 1 below, the total numbers of interceptions at sea increased more than tenfold between 1996 and 2003, from 1,573 to more than 18,000. Moreover, like Albania, Morocco is no longer just a country of origin but increasingly one of transit for immigrants coming from further south. This is evidenced in the sharp rise in the number of sub-Saharan migrants intercepted by Spanish authorities along the country’s southern borders, which jumped from a mere 142 in 1996 to 8,747 in 2002,
representing an increase from 1.8 per cent to 41.7 per cent of the total number of seaborne migrants apprehended in Spain (ICMPD, 2004: 5).

Comparable to the situation in the Adriatic, the flow of would-be immigrants from (and through) Morocco into Spain is also considered to have become increasingly controlled by smuggling networks, operating from both sides of the Straits. Many of these are said to have previously been involved mainly in narcotics trafficking from Morocco into Spain and the rest of Europe, and here too it has become increasingly common to assume relatively close connections between irregular immigration, drug trafficking and other types of cross-border crime (Gomez, 1997; Paniagua, 2000). Finally, and in particular subsequent to the Madrid bombings of 11 March 2003, in which Moroccan immigrants resident in Spain played a crucial role, migration from Morocco has also increasingly been associated not only with human smuggling and trafficking but also with international and in particular Islamist terrorism (see, for example, Sendagorta, 2005).

While thus clandestine migration across the Mediterranean – in particular through its linkage with cross-border crime and transnational terrorism – has come to be framed as a security challenge by European countries, it is however also increasingly seen as a serious humanitarian problem. In countries on both sides of the Mediterranean, there has been growing concern with the rising number of deaths of would-be immigrants seeking to reach Europe via sea. As has been pointed out by Michael Pugh, in countries such as Italy or Spain hardly a week goes by without reports of shipwrecks and dead bodies of migrants found in their waters and on their beaches (Pugh, 2001). Accidents are frequent not only because would-be immigrants often travel in insecure vessels but also because the human smugglers show little if any concern for their safety. According to the Andalusia-based human rights organization APDHA (Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos Andalucía), more than 4,000 migrants drowned seeking to enter Spain from Morocco since the beginning of the 1990s (APDHA, 2003). The ICMPD has estimated that, over the last decade, a total of at least 10,000 persons have died trying to cross the Mediterranean and reach Europe’s southern shores (ICMPD, 2004: 8).

Table 1. Interceptions of vessels and undocumented immigrants in Spanish waters, 1996–2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Vessels intercepted</th>
<th>Persons detained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>1,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>2,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>3,569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>14,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>997</td>
<td>17,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>16,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>18,420</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the terminology suggested by the so-called Copenhagen school in security studies, it could thus be argued that two different ‘referent objects of security’ and ensuing policy imperatives exist in current discourses on irregular migration across the Mediterranean, even if one of them is predominant (Waever et al., 1993; Buzan et al., 1998; Pugh, 2001). According to what seems to be the hegemonic discourse, clandestine immigration and (supposedly) related transnational challenges are considered a ‘threat’ to the stability and welfare of European states and societies, and the main objective is thus to deter and prevent undocumented immigration as effectively as possible. On the other hand, there is a discourse, articulated for example by human rights and immigrant support organizations, but also to a certain extent by governments, which focuses on the ‘human security’ or safety of the would-be immigrants. From this perspective, the main imperative is not to curb migration by all possible means but rather to prevent the loss of life in the Mediterranean, protect the migrants against the human smugglers and ensure the rights of genuine refugees.

Policing Migration and Cross-Border Crime in the Mediterranean

One main policy response of southern European countries to the growing concern with irregular migration and cross-border crime from the south since the beginning of the 1990s has been to step up their efforts at policing their Mediterranean borders. The need to more effectively secure the EU’s external, including its maritime, frontiers to prevent illegal immigration and human smuggling has been underlined at the EU level at a number of EU Council meetings over recent years, including those of Tampere (October 1999), Laeken (December 2001), Seville (June 2002) and Thessaloniki (June 2003). Moreover, in November 2003, the European Council adopted a programme containing guidelines on combating illegal immigration across the EU’s maritime borders, and a number of joint maritime operations involving several European countries have taken place over recent years (European Council, 2003). In general, however, while these measures suggest that the management of the EU’s external frontiers is likely to become increasingly ‘communitarized’ in the future, the task of enforcing the EU’s outer – including its maritime – borders thus far still rests on each individual EU country’s border control forces.

As will be discussed in the following, in southern European countries the perceived need to upgrade their Mediterranean borders has led in particular to an increasing mobilisation of both paramilitary police and military security forces, as well as a resort to a growing amount of military-style hardware in preventing irregular immigration and cross-border crime. One can thus speak of an increasing ‘militarization’ of migration and crime control along the EU’s Mediterranean borders, not unlike the militarization of the US-Mexico border as mentioned previously.

Expansion of Paramilitary Border Police Forces

One aspect of this process of border militarization along the Mediterranean frontiers of both Italy and Spain has been the increasing deployment and expansion
of semi-military security forces, namely police forces with a military status, to deal with undocumented immigration by sea. In general terms, these are internal security or police forces which, in contrast to ‘ordinary’ police forces, have a number of military characteristics, for example, in terms of organization, equipment or formal affiliation.6

In Italy, for instance, it is in particular the so-called Guardia di Finanza which has been increasingly mobilized in the fight against undocumented migration and human smuggling across the country’s maritime borders. Although in principle a customs police whose main task has traditionally been to prevent different forms of illicit economic activities such as contraband or tax evasion, the Guardia di Finanza is a semi-military institution which – although reporting to the Ministry of Finance – is organized along military lines and also formally considered a military force. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Guardia Finanza has emerged as the predominant agency in Italy in preventing illegal immigration and cross-border crime via sea, mainly because of its traditionally large fleet (Lutterbeck, 2004). As can be seen from Table 2 below, the Guardia di Finanza has also expanded considerably over the 1990s: between 1989 and 2000, its budget almost tripled while its staff grew by about 28 per cent over this period. Moreover, as shown by Table 3, it is in particular the Guardia Finanza’s naval and air components, the most important sections in the fight against irregular migration and trafficking via sea, which have been upgraded massively from the early 1990s onwards.

While the Guardia di Finanza, as a semi-military police force, has long been equipped with various military-style hardware, including actual warships, with the intensification of the fight against clandestine migration via sea, it has also been acquiring a considerably amount of additional such equipment. For example, over the 1990s, many of its boats and aircraft have been equipped with military-style technology such as thermal cameras and FLIR (Forward-Looking Infrared) systems to more effectively patrol the seas at night (Commando Generale della Guardia di Finanza, 2001: 17). Moreover, along the country’s Adriatic coast,

### Table 2. Italian Guardia Di Finanza: Evolution of size and budget, 1989–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Budget (in billion euros)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>52,280</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>60,100</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>64,129</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>59,874</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>59,657</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>65,995</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>61,028</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>66,983</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources:* annual reports of Guardia di Finanza.
the Guardia di Finanza has been deploying anti-terror radar systems developed by the Israeli army to monitor clandestine migration from Albania (Chieco, 2000).

In Spain, as well, the increasing concern with irregular migration and narcotics smuggling from the south has prompted such a trend towards militarizing the country’s southern frontiers. Here it is in particular the Guardia Civil which has become the lead agency in dealing with irregular immigration across the Mediterranean. Similarly to the Italian Guardia di Finanza, the Spanish Guardia Civil is a paramilitary police force which reports both to the interior and the defence ministries. As its Italian counterpart, the Guardia Civil too has been upgraded significantly to prevent more effectively undocumented immigration and trafficking by sea, which has also involved the deployment of an increasing amount of military-type hardware along the country’s southern coast. In 1999 alone, €200m were allocated to the Guardia Civil for the construction of a vast and what has been claimed to be the technologically most sophisticated coast control system to date, the so-called SIVE (Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia del Estrecho). The system is to be composed of various military-style technology, such as fixed and mobile radars, infrared sensors as well as boats, helicopters and aeroplanes which are being deployed along the country’s Mediterranean coast (Abos Coto, 2000; El País, 15 February 2000).

Moreover, as can be seen from Table 4 below, also the Guardia Civil expanded steadily over the 1990s, although its overall growth rates have been less dramatic

### Table 3. Italian Guardia Di Finanza: Evolution of naval and air service, 1989–99

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Boats</th>
<th>Personnel (naval service)</th>
<th>Helicopters</th>
<th>Aeroplanes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>4800</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>4900</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>7000</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: annual reports of Guardia di Finanza.

### Table 4. Spanish Guardia Civil: Evolution of size and budget, 1990–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Budget (in billion euros)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>61,192</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>62,192</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>63,608</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>64,691</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>67,885</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>71,245</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>72,199</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>71,905</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>70,778</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>71,001</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>70,143</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: data provided by Guardia Civil.
than those of the Italian Guardia di Finanza. As in the case of the latter, however, it is in particular the Guardia Civil’s naval and air components which have witnessed tremendous upgrading in response to the heightened concerns with irregular migration and cross-border crime and from the south (see Table 5).

European Navies in the Prevention of Irregular Migration and Cross-Border Crime

The increasing militarization of migration and crime control in the Mediterranean has been manifest not only in the upgrading of paramilitary police forces concerned with securing Europe’s Mediterranean borders, but also in the growing involvement of European navies – namely of external security forces – in this area. Over the 1990s (southern) European countries have been increasingly deploying warships and other military hardware to prevent migration and illicit trafficking via sea. Officially this measure is often justified with the argument that maritime police forces (as opposed to navies) are insufficiently equipped in terms of boats and aircraft to effectively patrol the seas, especially over larger distances and beyond the state’s coastal waters, thus requiring the intervention of naval forces.7

The most significant example in this regard has been the Italian Navy. Since the first Albanian refugee crisis of 1991, the Italian Navy has been actively engaged in the prevention of undocumented migration across the Adriatic, and over the 1990s, immigration control has increasingly become one of its core functions. As can be seen from Table 6 below, the hours of operation the Italian Navy has been devoting to the prevention of migration increased more than sixfold between 1991 and 1999. In 2002, about one-quarter of the Italian Navy’s total hours of navigation (some 20,000 out of 85,000) were exclusively devoted to immigration control (Caffio, 2005).

The navies of other southern European countries, as well, have increasingly taken on an anti-immigration role in the Mediterranean. Since January 2002, the French Navy, for example, has been conducting so-called Operation Amarante in the Mediterranean, whose main objective has been to prevent irregular migration and human smuggling in the eastern Mediterranean and through the Channel of Sicily.

Table 5. Spanish Guardia civil: Evolution of naval and air service, 1985–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Boats</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Helicopters</th>
<th>Aeroplanes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: website of Guardia Civil, available at http://www.guardiacivil.org

Table 6. Immigration-control activities of Italian navy, 1991–99 (In hours of operation)

<table>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,706</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>5,225</td>
<td>4,568</td>
<td>16,846</td>
<td>16,135</td>
<td>17,513</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: CENSIS (1999); annual reports of Italian Navy.
Also at the multilateral level, anti-migration operations have been carried out by European naval forces in the Mediterranean. In January 2003, for instance, the navies of France, the UK, Spain, Portugal and Italy launched Operation Ulysses, which was aimed at preventing undocumented migration and people smuggling across the Straits of Gibraltar as well as from the west Sahara towards the Canary Islands (El País, 28 January 2003). North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) naval forces as well have been involved in immigration control in the Mediterranean. In 2002, NATO’s Mediterranean fleet was dispatched to the eastern Mediterranean under Operation Active Endeavour. Although the official aim of the mission has been to combat terrorism, the prevention of irregular migration and human trafficking across the Mediterranean has also been considered an important objective (Sanfelice di Monteforte, 2003).

The deployment of warships to curb migration via sea – as the arguably most problematic aspect of the militarization of migration and crime control in the Mediterranean – of course, also raises important questions as to the concrete role such military forces do or should play in dealing with seaborne migrants, and whether for instance the use of force is considered legitimate in this context. Michael Pugh, for example, has argued that while European naval forces are increasingly being mobilized to cope with irregular migration by sea, these forces are unlikely to, and should not, be deployed as military formations to respond to boat people, namely in adversarial or militaristic mode, but should rather focus on rescue and other humanitarian operations (Pugh, 2001: 13).

On the other hand, the actual experience of, for instance, the Italian Navy in addressing irregular migration via sea suggests that the role of naval forces in this context can be quite ambiguous, and that humanitarian aspects do not necessarily stand in the forefront. Up until the Albanian refugee crisis of 1997, the official mission and modus operandi of the Italian Navy, at least as far as migration across the Adriatic was concerned, was to ‘stop’ and ‘divert’ vessels suspected of carrying undocumented immigrants across the Straits of Otranto, and for this purpose, the navy also had the authority to use force as long as it was used proportionately (Caffio, 2005). As a consequence, during the 1997 crisis, Italy was repeatedly accused not only by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International but also by the United Nations (UN) of having established an actual ‘naval blockade’ in the Adriatic to contain the refugee flows from Albania (Corriere della sera, 28 March 1997). While this was subsequently denied by Italian officials, the navy’s patrol activities nevertheless resulted in a major collision between an Italian warship and a boat transporting Albanian migrants in which more than 100 Albanians lost their lives (Corriere della sera, 29 March 1997; 30 March 1997). Since this accident, however, at least according to official declarations, the Italian Navy has changed its modus operandi and adopted a ‘softer’ approach in dealing with seaborne migrants. Instead of carrying out interdiction operations at sea and attempting to stop suspicious vessels, it is now said to focus mainly on rescuing the would-be immigrants in case of necessity (Caffio, 2005; Société internationale de droit militaire et de droit de la guerre, Gruppo Italiano).
In general, at the rhetorical level, it can be noted that the increasing deployment of
the various maritime security forces and the upgrading of the EU’s Mediterranean
borders, as discussed above, are usually officially justified in terms of both security
discourses or ‘threat constructions’ mentioned previously. On the one hand, these
measures are considered necessary to contain and deter irregular immigration and
(supposedly) related transnational challenges, which are seen as a ‘threat’ to
European states and societies. On the other hand, a key objective of these
surveillance and patrol activities is usually also said to be to save lives and put an
end to the ‘humanitarian tragedy’ in the Mediterranean.9

What should be added, however, is that while would-be immigrants have certainly
been rescued thanks to these policing efforts, justifying the reinforcement of
maritime patrols on such humanitarian grounds tends to obscure the fact that these
measures often also themselves increase the dangers facing the clandestine migrants
seeking to reach the EU from the south. Thus, despite the supposedly softer
approach adopted by Italian naval forces, for example, collisions with vessels
transporting would-be immigrants have continued to occur along Italy’s southern
borders, some of which with deadly consequences.10 Another consequence of the
reinforced controls along Italy’s coast, which has greatly increased the risks for
the undocumented immigrants, is that the people smugglers, in order to avoid being
intercepted by the police, have started to force the migrants out of the boats before
actually reaching Italy’s shores (CENSIS, 1999). Moreover, in Spain, it has been
shown by the above-mentioned human rights organization APDHA, which has
documented the circumstances under which seaborne migrants attempting to enter
Spain from Morocco have died, that in 2004, the second largest number of deaths
(71 out of a total of 289) has occurred at the moment of interception at sea by
Spanish authorities, which suggest that such operations constitute a considerable
risk for the migrants (APDHA, 2004: 9).11 Finally, as will be discussed towards the
end of this article, a typical effect of the enhanced maritime patrol activities has been
to divert the migratory flows towards further and more dangerous routes across the
Mediterranean, thus directly contributing to the rising death toll among the would-be
immigrants.

Deepening Law Enforcement Co-operation across the Mediterranean

The growing concern in European countries with irregular migration and
transnational crime from across the Mediterranean has not only led to an increasing
deployment and upgrading of maritime forces to secure the EU’s southern borders, it
has also prompted an intensification of law enforcement co-operation between the
countries north and south of the Mediterranean in these areas. One point often noted
by analysts of the EU’s Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the Barcelona
Process is the limited and indeed declining collaboration on security issues between
the countries north and south of the Mediterranean, by which usually external
security of defence issues are meant. As has recently been pointed out by Rosa
Balfour, for example, the content of co-operation on security and defence matters
within the framework of the EMP has actually been shrinking since this initiative
was launched in 1995 – the main obstacle having been the deterioration of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Balfour, 2004: 13).

What tends to be overlooked in this regard, however, is that while collaboration between north and south Mediterranean countries on external security or defence issues has remained limited or has even declined over recent years, there has been a significant deepening of co-operation between these countries at the level of internal security or law enforcement, in particular in areas such as irregular migration and organized crime. In other words, as these transnational phenomena have gained greater saliency, the focus of security co-operation between the countries north and south of the Mediterranean has increasingly shifted from the realm of external to that of internal security or law enforcement. The intensification of police or law enforcement co-operation across the Mediterranean can be observed both within the (multilateral) framework of EMP as well as at the bilateral level.

**Law Enforcement Co-operation within the Framework of EMP**

One general development within the EMP since the late 1990s has been that EU countries have been devoting more attention to co-operation on internal security or Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) issues with EMP partner countries, reflecting not only deepening integration among EU countries in this area but also growing concerns with challenges such as irregular migration, drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime from the countries south of the Mediterranean. While in the Barcelona declaration these issues were given only limited importance, over recent years they have rapidly moved up on the EMP agenda. As has been pointed out by Richard Gillespie, from early 2001 onward, JHA has generally become a priority area within the EMP, with regular meetings of senior officials of interior ministries in parallel to meetings on political and security matters (Gillespie, 2003: 27). In the aftermath of 9/11, these efforts have also increasingly focused on international terrorism in addition to irregular migration and cross-border crime, even though co-operation in this area continues to be hampered by the lack of a common definition of terrorism among the countries north and south of the Mediterranean.

At the Valencia conference in 2002, a framework document on regional co-operation on internal security issues such as combating drug trafficking, organized crime and terrorism as well as co-operation on migration-related issues was adopted. Subsequently, relatively large-scale co-operative projects on JHA issues were launched in several southern Mediterranean countries within the framework of MEDA (*Mesures d’accompagnement*). In general terms, these programmes have pursued two main objectives. On the one hand, they have focused on institutional reforms of the internal security apparatus of southern Mediterranean countries, such as strengthening the rule of law or combating corruption. On the other, they have also pursued the more operational objective of enhancing the capacity of, and the co-operation with, these countries in fighting irregular migration and organized crime (Hänggi and Tanner, 2005: 70–5; Euromed Report, 2005). Indeed, it can be argued that this second objective has been at the forefront.
In Algeria, for example, one of the main goals of the €10 million police reform project which has been carried out since 2000 has been to improve the capacity of the Algerian police to manage irregular migration into and through the country (European Commission, 2005: 20–23). Similarly, in Morocco, the largest project which has been launched within this context, and to which €40m have been allocated, has been the construction of a border surveillance system composed of radars and other high-tech equipment along the country’s northern coast to prevent irregular migration and drug trafficking towards Spain (El Pais, 6 October 2002; Youngs, 2005: 8).

The growing importance attributed to co-operation on internal security or JHA issues is, finally, also evidenced in the Action Plans which the EU has proposed for several southern Mediterranean countries under the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy. These proposed Action Plans contain extensive provisions on collaboration in internal security areas such as irregular migration, organized crime (including human trafficking), drug trafficking, money laundering as well as terrorism.  

**Bilateral Law-Enforcement Co-operation**

A deepening of law enforcement collaboration between the countries north and south of the Mediterranean can also be noted at the bilateral level. Such co-operation has been particularly pronounced between those countries which have been ‘linked’ through migratory movements, that is, which have become either destination or source/transit countries of the migratory flows from south to north.

One significant example of such cross-Mediterranean law enforcement collaboration – although not concerning an EMP partner country – has been the co-operation between Italy and Albania. In the aftermath of the crisis of 1997, Italy, as well as the EU, have been engaging in very intense collaboration with Albanian law enforcement and internal security agencies, with the main objective of preventing irregular migration and human smuggling from and through Albania towards Italy. In the latter half of the 1990s, a number of bilateral (namely Italian) and multilateral police assistance missions were set up in Albania – most of them along the country’s Adriatic coast – to support the Albanian police in combating migration and human trafficking from its shores towards Italy (Lutterbeck, 2001). These missions have involved activities such as joint patrols along the Albanian coast, training, the provision of technical equipment, and intelligence sharing. In the late 1990s, some 300 Italian police and coastguard officers were deployed in Albania in the framework of these police assistance missions (Caiti, 1999; Puddu, 1999).

An important element of this collaboration has also been the repatriation of undocumented migrants who have been caught by Italian authorities from Italy back to Albania, under the readmission agreement concluded between the two countries in 1997. In 1999 alone, some 18,000 irregular migrants, including third country nationals, were repatriated from Italy to Albania under this agreement (ICMPD, 2001: 4).

Between Spain and Morocco, as well, there has been a considerable increase in police co-operation in preventing irregular migration and trafficking across the
Mediterranean, despite the traditionally difficult relationship between the two countries. Throughout most of the 1990s, Morocco frequently saw itself accused by Spanish authorities of turning a blind eye on illegal migration and narcotics smuggling from its territory, and the immigration issue regularly provoked serious diplomatic rows between the two countries. In recent years, however, joint law enforcement efforts between the two countries to fight irregular migration and human smuggling from (and through) Morocco into Spain have been on the rise. In December 2003, for instance, the Spanish and Moroccan governments announced a plan to carry out joint patrols along both Morocco’s Mediterranean and its Atlantic coast. The plan comprises three elements: exchange of liaison officers in airports and border check points, the creation of joint anti-trafficking units, and the carrying out of mixed patrols along both land and maritime borders. In exchange for these measures, Spain granted Morocco a financial aid package of almost €400m over a three-year period (El Mundo, 4 December 2003; El País, 9 December 2003).

There has also been sizeable technical assistance to Morocco in the field of border and immigration control. In 2002, the Spanish government, within the context of its EU presidency, demanded that the EU finance the construction of the already mentioned €40million-coast control system along Morocco’s shores – a project which is to be carried out under Spanish and French auspices (Diagonal, 23 June 2005). Spanish authorities, instead of criticizing Morocco for its insufficient border controls, nowadays also not infrequently acknowledge Morocco’s ‘co-operative attitude’ not only in preventing departures from its territory but also in tacking back irregular migrants who have crossed through Morocco and have been intercepted by Spanish authorities.

Another significant example of deepening cross-Mediterranean law enforcement collaboration is that between Italy and Libya. Although long considered an ‘outlaw state’ and shunned by western countries for its support of terrorist activities, Libya is increasingly considered an important ally in the fight against irregular migration and cross-border crime across the Mediterranean. As would-be migrants passing through Libya typically seek to enter the EU via Italy, it is mainly Italy which has sought to engage in closer co-operation with Libya. In July 2003, an agreement was signed between the two countries on joint measures to combat irregular immigration and human smuggling from Libya (La Repubblica, 4 July 2003). Since then, a broad range of joint activities aimed at enhancing Libya’s capacity to secure its borders have been undertaken. These have included, for instance, an exchange of liaison officers specialized in illegal migration and human trafficking, the organization of training courses for Libyan border police officers, and the provision of technical equipment to strengthen Libyan border controls. Moreover, the possibilities of carrying joint patrols along Libya’s coast have been examined even though not yet implemented (Ministero dell’Interno, 2003: 6).

In this context, as well, an important aspect of Italian-Libyan co-operation has been the repatriation of undocumented migrants intercepted in Italy who have passed through Libya. Since 2004, more than 1,000 irregular immigrants have reportedly been repatriated from Italy to Libya on charter flights (EU Business, 14 April 2005; Statewatch, 1 June 2005). Italy, together with Germany, has also
proposed to set up migration and refugee detention camps in Libya (as well as in other North African countries) so that asylum applications could be processed ‘extra-territorially’ before the would-be immigrants attempt to cross the Mediterranean. This proposal was, however, subsequently rejected by the EU due to rather fierce resistance by countries such as France, Spain and Sweden, which have considered such measures as incompatible with the Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951 (HRW, 2005: 371–3). It is also noteworthy, finally, that Italy has also been pushing to lift the arms embargo imposed on Libya since 1986 for its sponsoring of terrorist activities, in order to provide the country with various military-style equipment – such as radars and night vision devices – to beef up its borders. In October 2004, the EU agreed to end these sanctions against Libya, thus paving the way for the provision of this equipment.

Overall, there has thus been a considerable intensification and expansion of police or law enforcement co-operation between the countries north and south of the Mediterranean, driven by a growing concern – mainly in the countries of the north – with irregular immigration and other (supposedly related) cross-border challenges from the south. However, while these collaborative efforts, to some extent at least, seem indispensable in curbing irregular migration from the south and if effective, could also help to save lives by preventing departures of would-be immigrants across the Mediterranean, they too have their risks. Critics of these endeavours typically point out that the main objective of European countries in pursuing such co-operation is, in fact, to ‘externalize’ immigration control beyond their borders towards southern Mediterranean countries, which are thus being co-opted into the role of ‘gatekeepers’ or ‘buffer states’ – usually in exchange for financial assistance or a closer relationship with European countries (or the EU). In particular the fact that many of these countries have a rather appalling human rights record and no functioning systems of refugee protection makes this collaboration seem rather – or even highly – problematic, especially as far as the repatriation of undocumented migrants is concerned. In this regard, the growing co-operation between Italy and Libya, in particular, has recently met with widespread criticism not only from human rights organizations but also, for example, from the European Parliament. In April 2004, for instance, the European Parliament called upon Italy to stop deporting irregular immigrants to Libya, arguing that Libya did not have a proper asylum system nor any effective refugee protection, and that migrants in Libya were held in camps in unacceptable conditions. It also pointed out that more than 100 migrants who had been repatriated from Italy to Libya were reported to have died following their expulsion from Libya (EU Business, 14 April 2005).

The ‘Side Effects’: Growth in Human Smuggling and Diversion of Migratory Flows

What have been the effects of the various policing efforts described above on the migratory flows across the Mediterranean? Needless to say, it is practically impossible to assess if and to what extent these measures have been successful in achieving their main objective, namely of reducing irregular migration across
the EU’s southern frontiers. If the number of interceptions is taken as an indicator of the actual extent of irregular immigration, then it can be noted that as far as Italy is concerned, there has indeed been a decline in apprehensions of undocumented migrants along the country’s southern borders after 1999 (see Table 7 below): after the peak of almost 50,000 interceptions was reached in 1999, this figure dropped to about 14,000 by 2004. However, if it is taken into account that almost half (22,418) of the would-be immigrants caught in 1999 were Albanian Kosovars fleeing the crisis in Kosovo, then this decline is much less pronounced. Moreover, one can hardly speak of a sustained downward trend, as still in 2002, almost the same number of undocumented immigrants were apprehended as in 1999 (if the same number of Kosovar Albanians are deduced). In Spain, on the other hand, no such decline in apprehensions can be observed: as shown by Table 1 above, the number of would-be immigrants intercepted along the country’s Mediterranean borders has continued to rise unabated since the mid-1990s, without any signs of this trend reversing.

While thus neither in Italy nor in Spain have efforts to render these countries’ southern borders more impermeable had a clear effect in reducing irregular immigration into these countries, these measures have also had certain unwanted and undesirable side effects, two of which seem particularly worth noting: the increasing professionalization of irregular immigration, especially in the sense of a growing involvement of human smugglers, and the diversion of the migratory flows towards other, typically more dangerous, routes.

Growth in Human Smuggling

As already mentioned previously, it is now commonly agreed among analysts that irregular immigration across both Italy and Spain’s southern borders – as well as across other external borders of the EU – has become increasingly controlled by human smugglers and trafficking organizations. One indication of this can be seen in the growing number of people smugglers arrested in these countries. In Italy, for example, the number of human smugglers arrested rose more than threefold between 1997 and 2000, from 297 to more than 1,000 (Ministero dell’Interno, 2001: 293). In Spain, the number of persons arrested for human smuggling increased from 151 in 1999 to 225 in 2003 (Ministerio del Interior, 2000; ICMPD, 2004: 5).

It seems clear that the increasingly prominent role played by human smugglers and trafficking rackets has to a considerable extent been driven by the continuous upgrading of the EU’s outer borders. This process can be illustrated, for instance, with respect to irregular migration between Albania and Italy, and the evolution of the modes of transportation used to cross the Straits of Otranto. In the early 1990s, when controls along Italy’s Adriatic coast were still relatively lax, most Albanian ‘boat people’ crossed the Straits in a largely unorganized fashion, using various types of makeshift vessels and ordinary fishing boats (Pastore, 1998: 2–3; Piperno, 2002: 2–3). From about the mid-1990s onward, however, as Italian patrol activities became increasingly dense, and a growing amount of radars and other high-tech equipment have been deployed to monitor in the Straits, it has become practically
impossible to cross the Adriatic by such ordinary means. The would-be immigrants have thus increasingly turned to Albanian smuggling gangs which have been operating speedboats – usually extremely fast low-lying rubber dinghies (so-called gommoni) equipped with two outboard engines – to cross the Straits. It is estimated that, by 2000, between 5 and 10 of these speedboats were departing from Albania each night, transporting between 150 and 300 would-be immigrants across the Adriatic (ICMPD, 2000: 89).

The growing difficulties of crossing the Straits of Otranto has also driven up the prices charged for a trip across the Adriatic and thus enhanced the profitability of this business. Thus, while in 1995, Albanian trafficking rackets were charging US$500–750 US dollars for a trip across the Straits, by 2000 the fee jumped to US$3,000–5,000 (Ministero dell’Interno, 1995: 434; ICMPD, 2000: 89). In 2000, the smuggling organizations based in the Albanian port city of Valona alone are estimated to have had an annual turnover of US$30–60m (ICMPD, 2000: 11).

In Spain as well efforts to reinforce the country’s southern borders seem to have gone hand in hand with a growth in people smuggling across the Mediterranean. In the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, for instance, which is an important base for people smuggling rackets, the first trafficking networks were dismantled in 2000, shortly after the above-mentioned coast control system along Spain’s Mediterranean coast was put into operation (which also coincided with an upgrading of the border fences around the enclave). Spanish authorities in Ceuta themselves also readily acknowledge that there is a direct connection between stricter border controls, on the one hand, and the enhanced role played by people smugglers and trafficking rackets on the other.

**Diversion of Migratory Flows**

Another deleterious side effect of the enhanced controls along both Italy and Spain’s southern borders, in particular from the perspective of the safety of the would-be immigrants, has been the diversion of the migratory flows towards other – usually further and more dangerous – routes across the Mediterranean. In Italy, as already mentioned, the main entry point throughout the 1990s was the Straits of Otranto and the country’s Apulian coast. In 1999, more than 45,000 undocumented immigrants were intercepted here, which represented more than 90 per cent of the total number of apprehensions of seaborne migrants in Italy. By 2004, however, this number had dropped to as little as 18, arguably due to the intensification of controls in the Adriatic and the far-reaching co-operation between Italy and Albania in preventing migration and people smuggling (see Table 7 below).

While thus Italy (and Albania) have indeed been successful in ‘plugging’ the Straits of Otranto, practically in parallel to the dying out of this route, new routes across the Mediterranean towards Italy have emerged. Over recent years, it is in particular Sicily which has become the main entry point into Italy. As shown by Table 7 below, between 1998 and 2004, the number of irregular migrants intercepted in Sicily jumped from 848 to some 14,000, or from 0.02 per cent to more than 98 per
cent of all apprehensions along Italy’s southern borders. It is estimated that most of these migrants have transited through Libya, and the Channel of Sicily has thus increasingly replaced the Straits of Otranto as the main gateway for irregular migrants seeking to reach Italy from the south. By 2003, as many as 80 per cent of all irregular migrants seeking to cross the Mediterranean from the south were estimated to pass through Libya and the Channel of Sicily (ICMPD, 2004: 4). Migration researchers at the Rome-based CESPI (Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale) have seen in this swift shift of the migratory flows from the Otranto to the Channel of Sicily as evidence of the high degree of adaptability and flexibility of the transnational trafficking networks, which if certain routes become unviable, are capable of quickly finding new entry points and use their acquired skills to exploit the new ‘loopholes’ (Monzini et al., 2004).

This diversion effect has also come at a considerable human cost, as the journey across the Channel of Sicily is much further than the one across the Adriatic and thus also more dangerous for the would-be immigrants. For the year 2003 alone, more than 400 deaths off the coasts of Sicily have been documented, more than died during any one year in the Straits of Otranto (Cuttita, 2004).

A similar diversion effect towards longer and more dangerous routes can be observed along Spain’s southern borders, where the Mediterranean route across the Straits of Gibraltar has been increasingly replaced by the Atlantic route via the Canary Islands. With the upgrading of controls along the Straits of Gibraltar, a growing number of would-be immigrants has been seeking to reach Spain via the Canary Islands, departing from Morocco’s Atlantic coast. Thus, while between 2001 and 2003, the number of undocumented migrants intercepted trying to cross the Straits of Gibraltar dropped from 14,405 to 10,400, the number of those landing on the Canary Islands increased from 4,112 to 9,800 over this period (see Table 8 below). In this case as well, the diversion effect has also meant that clandestine

### Table 7. Irregular immigrants intercepted along Italian coast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1998</th>
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<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apulia</td>
<td>39,065</td>
<td>46,481</td>
<td>18,990</td>
<td>8,546</td>
<td>3,111</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calabria</td>
<td>8,828</td>
<td>1,545</td>
<td>5,045</td>
<td>6,093</td>
<td>1,687</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicily</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>1,973</td>
<td>2,782</td>
<td>5,504</td>
<td>10,151</td>
<td>14,017</td>
<td>13,594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38,159</td>
<td>49,999</td>
<td>26,817</td>
<td>20,143</td>
<td>23,719</td>
<td>14,331</td>
<td>13,635</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Italian Interior Ministry.*

### Table 8. Interceptions of irregular immigrants in the straits of Gibraltar and the Canary Islands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Straits of Gibraltar</td>
<td>2,694</td>
<td>12,785</td>
<td>14,405</td>
<td>6,795</td>
<td>9,794</td>
<td>10,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canary Islands</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>2,410</td>
<td>4,112</td>
<td>9,875</td>
<td>9,382</td>
<td>9,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,569</td>
<td>15,195</td>
<td>18,517</td>
<td>16,670</td>
<td>19,176</td>
<td>20,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: Spanish Interior Ministry; APDHA (2004).*
immigrants have been facing greater risks to their safety. Thus, for the year 2003, APDHA reported 137 deaths off the Canary Islands, whereas 25 would-be immigrants died trying to reach Spain through the Straits of Gibraltar (APDHA, 2004: 8).

Border Escalation

Both of the ‘by-products’ of EU countries’ efforts to enhance their Mediterranean borders discussed above – the increasing involvement of human smugglers, and the diversion of the migratory flows towards alternative routes – seem not only to have had a largely negative impact on the safety of the would-be immigrants, but have also themselves provided the rationale for further upgrading of the EU’s southern borders. In both Italy and Spain, the deployment of more and faster patrol boats and the use of ever more sophisticated – including military-style – surveillance equipment is usually justified by the increasingly high degree of sophistication of the human smugglers, and the ensuing need to resort to such extraordinary measures, typically without acknowledging that it is precisely such efforts themselves which are fostering the growing professionalism of the people smugglers.

The diversion effect, in turn, is driving the geographic expansion of these border enforcement and maritime patrol efforts. Italy, for example, once almost exclusively concerned with monitoring its Adriatic coast and illegal immigration from Albania, now sees itself compelled to also devote large efforts to controlling the Channel of Sicily and clandestine migration from Libya. Similarly, in Spain, a growing amount of resources have now become necessary to secure the Canary Islands against irregular migration as well.17 Also in this respect, it is hardly ever acknowledged that these measures have only become necessary because the original routes have been blocked or made more difficult.

Similar to the process of ‘border escalation’ highlighted by Peter Andreas along the US-Mexico border, one can thus speak of a largely self-reinforcing dynamic – not unlike an arms race – whereby stricter enforcement efforts by state border control forces provoke responses on the part of the irregular border crossers, which in turn make it seem necessary to further strengthen the borders (Andreas, 1999, 2000).

Conclusions

Although throughout history the Mediterranean has been viewed as a bridge as well as a barrier or border, during both the Cold War and the post-Cold War era, the second perspective seems to have been the predominant one. During the Cold War, western countries viewed the Mediterranean as NATO’s ‘southern flank’, as a dividing line between East and West and as a potential battleground between the fleets of the two opposing blocs. Areas such as the Straits of Gibraltar or the Channel of Sicily were seen as strategically crucial ‘maritime choke points’ where western countries sought to block and turn back a potential Soviet naval thrust through the Mediterranean sea.
With the end of bipolarity, the Mediterranean seems to remain a dividing line, no longer between East and West but rather between North and South. Not unlike the US-Mexico border, it is a line of separation between highly industrialized, prosperous and stable countries, and countries which are plagued by poverty, demographic imbalances and various domestic and regional tensions. What has changed, however, is not only the directionality of the line but also the nature of the threats and challenges that have come to be associated with the Mediterranean. At least for the countries to the north, the principal risks they are considered to face in this region are now transnational in nature, with phenomena such as irregular migration, organized crime and transnational terrorism figuring at the top of the Mediterranean security agenda. Interestingly, with these shifting security concerns, sites like the Straits of Gibraltar or the Channel of Sicily have retained their ‘strategic’ importance, even if their function has changed: instead of maritime check points along NATO’s ‘southern flank’ they are now seen as problematic ‘loopholes’ in the EU’s southern borders which are to be secured against illegal immigration and other irregular transnational actors seeking to enter. 18

Arguably the most significant manifestation of this changing security agenda in the Mediterranean has been the continuous intensification and expansion of policing activities in and across the Mediterranean sea, aimed at curbing irregular migration, human smuggling and other transnational challenges. As discussed in this article, this has involved both the increasing hardening and militarization of European countries’ southern maritime borders – namely, the deployment of an ever larger number of semi-military and military forces and hardware to prevent migration and cross-border crime – as well as an intensification of law enforcement co-operation between the countries north and south of the Mediterranean. While these measures are often officially justified both on security as well as on humanitarian grounds – and lives have certainly been saved thanks to enhanced patrols in the Mediterranean – it seems clear that these efforts have also increased the risks for the would-be immigrants, in particular by forcing them towards more dangerous routes. More generally, such humanitarian arguments, of course, also obscure the fact that the very existence of the phenomenon of ‘boat people’ has been a problem of European countries’ own making: it has been the consequence of their increasingly strict immigration, visa and asylum policies, which have left clandestine entry as practically the only possibility to enter the EU.

Moreover, while some of these border enforcement measures along the EU’s Mediterranean borders have indeed succeeded in reducing irregular migration along certain routes, such as the Staits of Otranto or the Straits of Gibraltar, they have not had any discernible impact on the overall volume of irregular migration across the Mediterranean, at least as far as Italy and Spain are concerned. Rather they have had the perverse side effects of fostering the growing involvement of human smugglers in the transport of migrants across the Mediterranean, and of diverting the migratory flows towards other, usually more dangerous, routes. These side effects, in turn, have not only heightened the dangers facing those seeking to enter, they have also created new ‘needs’ to intensify and expand further patrol and surveillance efforts along the EU’s southern borders. The obvious conclusion here seems to be that as long
as the ‘migratory pressure’ in the countries of origin persists, and no or only very limited possibilities of legal immigration exist, any effort to render the EU’s Mediterranean (or its other) borders more impermeable will mainly produce such undesirable side effects instead of limiting the overall volume of irregular immigration.

Finally, it can be noted that with security concerns in the Mediterranean increasingly shifting from external security and defence issues towards internal or transnational challenges, such as irregular migration, cross-border crime and transnational terrorism, the Mediterranean security agenda has also in certain ways become more co-operative in nature. As discussed in this article, there has been a significant increase in police and law enforcement collaboration between the countries bordering the Mediterranean, both at the multilateral and bilateral levels, in particular in areas such as illegal immigration and organized crime. While this growth in security collaboration across the Mediterranean can at least in certain ways be seen as a positive development, and as indicative of a ‘rapprochement’ between the countries north and south of the Mediterranean, it too has its dangers. The main risk is that the management of migration towards the EU is increasingly being externalized towards countries with a poor human rights record and inadequate refugee protection, thus jeopardizing both the rights and security of the would-be immigrants, including potentially genuine refugees, seeking to reach the EU from the south.

Notes

1 The only exception seems to be Pugh (2000, 2001).
2 See, for example, Barros et al. (2002); Giacca (2004); Monzini et al. (2004); and Baldwin-Edwards (2005).
3 Albanian Mafia steps up people smuggling, BBC News, 3 August 2000.
4 Typically, both of these discourses can be found, for example, in the EU’s official documents dealing with irregular migration across the Mediterranean. While more effective controls along the EU’s borders, including its maritime borders, are considered essential for the security of the EU, the prevention of the loss of life and the need to ensure adequate refugee protection are usually also mentioned as important policy objectives in ‘managing’ the EU’s other borders. See, for example, European Council (2003) or European Council (2004).
5 These have included Operations Ulysses, Rio IV, Pegasus, Triton, Orca and Neptune.
6 There has also been a proposal of the European Commission to establish a common European border police (European Commission, 2003).
7 For a more in-depth discussion of such paramilitary forces and their role in border enforcement, see Lutterbeck (2004).
8 Author interview with officials of the Italian Navy and Spanish Guardia Civil, Bari (November 2001) and Algeciras (April 2002).
9 These operations were based on an agreement concluded between the Italian and Albanian governments, see Caffio (2005).
10 See note 2 (above).
12 The largest number of deaths occurred at the moment of departure from Morocco (APDHA, 2004: 9).
13 As of July 2005, action plans have been proposed for Morocco and Tunisia, and country reports, which are to serve as a basis for a action plan, have been issued for Egypt and Lebanon.
14 Since 1997, Italy has deployed three missions based on bilateral agreements: one under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior (Missione bilaterale interni), one under the supervision of the Ministry of
Finance (Missione bilaterale finanze), and one mission of the Italian Coast Guard. The EU has also established three police missions in Albania: the so-called MAPE (Multilateral Advisory Police Element), which was disbanded in 2001, the CAM (Customs Assistance Mission) and the CAM-Sea.

15 In 2002, the two countries even came close to a military conflict over the island of Perijil.

16 While the readmission agreement between Spain and Morocco was signed back in 1992, it was only in January 2004 that Moroccan authorities reportedly for the first time readmitted non-Moroccan citizens who had transited through Morocco and were intercepted by the Spanish police (El Pais, 29 January 2004).

17 Author interview with government officials, Ceuta, May 2002.

18 In 2004 alone, the Spanish government decided to allocate 70 million EUR under the Plan Canarias to extend the coast surveillance system set up along the country’s Mediterranean coast towards the Canary Islands (El Pais, 4.7.2004).

19 For a more general argument on the changing security function of state borders, see Andreas (2003).

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