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Illegal immigration at sea: a social analysis (Imigrația ilegală pe mare: o analiză socială)

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Abstract. Illegal immigration could be defined as a pathology of migration (which is a much broader, positive and needed phenomenon). It is a phenomenon of relevant historical importance; in particular, European history has been marked by many waves of migration, sometimes of whole populations. Unfortunately, the problem of illegal immigration is still very much present in today's society, touching certain countries in particular, such as Italy, which suffers immigration from sub-Saharan Africa and the Balkan area.

Keywords: immigration, Italy, sub-Saharian Africa, Balkan, routes.

The Origin of Illegal Immigration at Sea

Illegal immigration could be defined as a pathology of migration (which is a much broader, positive and needed phenomenon.¹ It is a phenomenon of relevant historical importance; in particular, European history has been marked by many waves of migration, sometimes of whole populations.² Unfortunately, the problem of illegal immigration is still very much present in today's society.

In the past, the ocean was a great barrier which protected and isolated the various populations inhabiting the continents;³ the romans, at the height of their power, actually proclaimed that the Mediterranean was to be considered their personal lake.⁴ This remained fundamentally unchanged until the decline of the Empire; after that, for about one thousand years, nothing relevant happened until the beginning of European expansion and the birth of single States as we know them today.⁵

Until the 16th century, oceanic voyages were very rare as they were considered dangerous; only the most daring attempted such crossings.⁶

However, they slowly started to become normal to the point that, at the beginning of the 17th century, the Dutch East India Company thought to commission a Dutch lawyer for a precise and motivated definition of the extraterritoriality of the sea as founded on the concept of "natural law". The lawyer was the accomplished Ugo Grozio, who first published the requested "Mare Liberum" in 1609 anonymously. The title originally read "The Freedom of the Seas, or the Right which belongs to the Dutch to take part in the East Indian trade", a title which clearly explained the reasons for the composition. In particular, Grozio stated that the oceans are all created by God and may therefore be freely navigated by everyone:

[...] that is to say, things which are called 'public' are, according to the Laws of the law of nations, the common property of all, and the private property of none. [...] The sea is common to all, because it is so limitless that it cannot become a possession of any one, and because it is adapted for the use of all, whether we consider it from the point of view of navigation or of fisheries.⁸

Although initially the interest in navigation was mainly for commercial purposes, in the last decades of the 17th century a new phenomenon was born and proceeded to grow at alarming speed: that of the exchange of money for the possibility of a better

life elsewhere. It was from that moment on that the phenomenon of illegal immigration at sea developed.

The Smuggling of Migrants: Humanitarian Issues

Migration has always existed. People have always sought to move and improve their lives; some, faced with violence, fear of persecution or economic catastrophe have not had much choice.

People are pushed towards the idea of migration by the possibility of economic growth, or family reunion; causes of forced migration include enslavement, ethnic cleansing and deportation.¹⁰

Today, however, the definitions which we have blur: the distinction between refugee, asylum seeker and illegal migrant is sometimes very hard to determine.

Often, people willing to migrate turn to subjects that will somehow "help" them enter a country against its legal requirements; however, while in the past only a few specialized people were able to provide this service, now it is provided by organized crime groups which have established contacts in the country of origin and in the country of destination.¹¹

The smuggling of migrants has increased drastically, especially in the last decade, owing particularly to the process of globalization and by the growing involvement of organised crime groups.¹² These

crime groups exploit the migrants; the way they are treated often amounts to new forms of slavery and to human rights abuses. ¹³ Illegal migration represents an incredible source of profit, as it has become a multi-million dollar activity.

There are many methods by which migrants can be smuggled; factors which influence these methods are the economic condition of the migrants (how much he is willing or able to pay) and the country of origin.¹⁴

The most dangerous (and the one which will be examined) is the typical case of migrants that are packed into small container ships or vessels crossing the Mediterranean Sea. The immigrant would approximately pay a few thousands Euros for this treatment. However, this method is incredibly dangerous because migrants are faced with poor health conditions, little or no safety measures and overcrowded boats; too often these journeys result in death.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime¹⁶ strives to prevent and combat transnational organized crime; one of its principal benefits is the definition of the concept of organized crime, overcoming what

is known in criminology as the Sicilian Model.¹⁷ The definition of organized crime, according to the convention, is the following:

"Organized criminal group" shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.¹⁸

Annexed to the convention are three protocols, one of which concerns the smuggling of migrants by land, sea or air.¹⁹

The idea of a treaty that specifically targeted migrant smuggling was born in the 1990s, when transnational organised crime in general was creating growing concerns.²⁰

Illegal migration was not, as we know, a new issue. However, the post-Cold War era perceived foreign threats such as illegal immigrants as particularly worrying; this caused migrant smuggling to be considered a main political concern, as it was considered a "security threat" by the preferred destination countries in Europe. North America and Australia.²¹ Furthermore, globalisation did nothing to improve the situation. Therefore, the elaboration Convention and the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol reflect the growing urgency to combat what was perceived as a

growing threat to the security of "powerful" countries.

The protocol was developed with the intention to provide a new and pragmatic way to approach the problem. The purpose of the protocol, as stated by Art. 2, is the following:

The purpose of this Protocol is to prevent and combat the smuggling of migrants, as well as to promote cooperation among States Parties to that end, while protecting the rights of smuggled migrants.²²

In addition, Art. 5 clearly expresses the intent to consider the migrants victims and not criminals:

Migrants shall not become liable to criminal prosecution under this Proto- col for the fact of having been the object of conduct set forth in article 6 of this Protocol.

Smuggling of migrants is defined by the protocol in Art. 3:

"Smuggling of migrants" shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.²³

Furthermore, Art. 6 determines that each state must adopt the necessary measures to consider migrant smuggling a criminal offense:

1. Each State Party shall adopt such legislative and other measures

as may be necessary to establish as criminal offences, when committed intentionally and in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit:

- (a) The smuggling of migrants;
- (b) When committed for the purpose of enabling the smuggling of migrants:
- . (i) Producing a fraudulent travel or identity document;
- . (ii) Procuring, providing or possessing such a document;
- (c) Enabling a person who is not a national or a permanent resident to remain in the State concerned without complying with the necessary requirements for legally remaining in the State by the means mentioned in sub- paragraph (b) of this paragraph or any other illegal means.²⁴

One of the protocol's most important achievements was reaching international consensus on a definition of "smuggling of migrants"; in fact, the protocol creates tangible parameters for determining the illegality of this crime type. 26

At the time of the protocol's creation, smuggling of migrants by sea was the most relevant mode of smuggling at a worldwide level; this still holds true today.²⁷ Smuggling by sea continues to be at the centre of media attention. Smuggling by sea is in fact prioritized by the protocol:

States Parties shall cooperate to the fullest extent possible to prevent and suppress the smuggling of migrants by sea, in accordance with the international law of the sea.²⁸

In order to do this, States are, in some circumstances, authorized to act against vessels reasonably suspected to be engaged in the smuggling of migrants by sea. First of all, it is possible to request assistance by other State Parties:

State A Partv that has reasonable grounds to suspect that a vessel that is flying its flag or claiming its registry, that is without nationality or that, though flying a foreign flag or refusing to show a flag, is in reality of the nationality of the State Party concerned engaged in the smuggling migrants by sea may request the assistance of other States Parties in suppressing the use of the vessel for that purpose. The States Parties so reauested shall render such assistance to the extent possible within their means. 29

If a State Party suspects that a vessel is engaged in the smuggling of migrants, it may request authorization from the flag State to board and search the vessel, and, if evidence is found, to take appropriate measures:

A State Party that has reasonable grounds to suspect that a vessel exercising freedom of navigation in accordance with international law and flying the flag or displaying the marks of registry of another State Party is engaged in the smuggling of migrants by sea may so notify the flag State, request confirmation of registry and, if

confirmed, request authorization from the flag State to take appropriate measures with regard to that vessel. The flag State may authorize the requesting State, inter alia:

- (a) To board the vessel;
- (b) To search the vessel; and
- (c) If evidence is found that the vessel is engaged in the smuggling of migrants by sea, to take appropriate measures with respect to the vessel and persons and cargo on board, as authorized by the flag State. 30

When a vessel suspected of smuggling of migrants is not flying a flag, it is possible to board and search the vessel anyway:

A State Party that has reasonable grounds to suspect that a vessel is engaged in the smuggling of migrants by sea and is without nationality or may be assimilated to a vessel without nationality may board and search the vessel. If evidence confirming the suspicion is found, that State Party shall take appropriate measures in accordance with relevant domestic and international law.³¹

Any measure must in any case be taken in conformity with the general principle of protection of human life at sea:

- 1. Where a State Party takes measures against a vessel in accordance with article 8 of this Protocol, it shall:
- (a) Ensure the safety and humane treatment of the persons on

board; (b) Take due account of the need not to endanger the security of the vessel or its cargo;

- (c) Take due account of the need not to prejudice the commercial or legal interests of the flag State or any other interested State;
- (d) Ensure, within available means, that any measure taken with regard to the vessel is environmentally sound.³²

With the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants, governments, by signing the protocol, agree to implement various specific forms of cooperation in order to exchange information and intelligence,³³ strengthen border controls,³⁴ verify and control travel and identity documents.³⁵ train and provide technical assistance particularly to countries of origin or transit,³⁶ prevent migrant smuggling through the strengthening of public awareness and the recognition of causes,³⁷ facilitate repatriation process, 38 and cooperate in the hope to reach bilateral or agreements regional arrangements.39

Article 15 requests that State Parties provide information programs to strengthen public awareness concerning the perception of migrant smuggling as a crime that exposes the migrants to serious risks:

1. Each State Party shall take measures to ensure that it provides or strengthens information programmes to increase public awareness of the fact that the conduct set forth in article 6 of this Protocol is a criminal activity frequently perpetrated by organized criminal groups for profit and that it poses serious risks to the migrants concerned.

2. In accordance with article 31 of the Convention, States Parties shall cooperate in the field of public information for the purpose of preventing potential migrants from falling victim to organized criminal groups. 40

The protocol also expressly provides for the protection of migrants. In particular, Art. 16 stresses the importance of protecting human rights and human life:

- 1. In implementing this Protocol, each State Party shall take, consistent with its obligations under international law, all appropriate measures, including legislation if necessary, to preserve and protect the rights of persons who have been the object of conduct set forth in article 6 of this Protocol as under accorded applicable international law, in particular the right to life and the right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- 2. Each State Party shall take appropriate measures to afford migrants appropriate protection against violence that may be inflicted upon them, whether by individuals or groups, by reason of being the object of conduct set forth in article 6 of this Protocol.
- 3. Each State Party shall afford appropriate assistance to migrants whose lives or safety are

endangered by reason of being the object of conduct set forth in article 6 of this Protocol.

- 4. In applying the provisions of this article, States Parties shall take into account the special needs of women and children.
- 5. In the case of the detention of a person who has been the object of conduct set forth in article 6 of this Protocol, each State Party shall comply with its obligations under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, where applicable, including that of informing the person concerned without delay about the provisions concerning notification to and communication with consular officers.

Currently, 129 States have signed and ratified the protocol;⁴² however, it must not be forgotten that ratification is only the first step towards the creation of an effective international cooperation in order to target and efficiently contrast the smuggling of migrants.

The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice General Assembly, in a thematic discussion on the theme "Violence against migrants, migrant workers and their families", recommended the approval of a draft resolution to the Economic and Social Council, then intended for adoption by the Assembly;⁴³ General the resolution concerned the promotion of efforts to eliminate violence against migrants, migrant workers and their families.

In this draft, the Commission particularly stressed the need to

fully implement the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants Land. Sea and by supplementing that Convention, and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing that Convention. In particular, there is a great necessity to take appropriate measures to effectively protect migrants against any type of violence that may be inflicted upon them, including protection from potential retaliation or intimidation for testifying as witnesses in criminal proceedings.44 On the basis of these considerations. the Commission proposed that the General assembly take a series of positions in order to reduce violence against migrants and ensure humane treatment towards them:

The General Assembly, [...]

- 1. Strongly condemns the continuing incidence of criminal acts against migrants, migrant workers and their families in all regions of the world, including criminal acts of violence motivated by racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance;
- 2. Requests Member States to ensure the humane treatment of all migrants, regardless of their migration status, especially women and children, with full protection of their rights, and to take all appropriate measures with due regard for the safety and dignity of the person;
 - 3. Urges Member States to adopt

measures for preventing and addressing effectively cases of violence against migrants, migrant workers and their families, and to ensure that the victims of such crimes receive humane and respectful treatment from Member States, regardless of their status;⁴⁵

The Commission also proposed Assembly General encourage Member States to adopt combat migrant measures to smuggling and reiterate its call for those Member States that have not yet done so to consider acceding to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols. 46 There was also a strong emphasis on the importance of protecting persons in vulnerable situations. especially when involved with activities of transnational and national organized criminal entities which profit from crimes against migrants (especially women and children), with no regard whatsoever for dangerous conditions 47 and inhumane International cooperation and specialized training law enforcement, border control and immigration were also deemed very necessary.48

Some main issues were identified: detention of irregular migrants is ill-monitored, work of irregular migrants goes unrecognised, migrant children's rights aren't respected, borders still see too much violence, irregular migrants aren't empowered to fight for their rights.⁴⁹

The solutions that Crépeau proposed are the following:

- Sealing borders is a fantasy: States should not encourage antiimmigration discourses.
- States should not criminalize irregular migration.
- Trafficking and smuggling must be utterly distinguished. □
- States should recognize that irregular migration performs an essential economic function. □
- States must empower migrants so they can fight for the respect of their rights. ⁵⁰

In order to help States fulfil their under obligations the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and its supplementary Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime created an in-depth training manual on investigating and prosecuting the smuggling of migrants,⁵¹ which put forward the same ideas as the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

However, the key point in considering migrant smuggling by sea is international cooperation: it does not merely strengthen response, but is essential to it.⁵² According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime:

An ideally pitched criminal justice response to migrant smuggling in one State will fail without the cooperation of other States. Without strengthened

cooperation, criminal smugglers will continue to commit their crimes with impunity, evading justice, undermining state sovereignty and security, and compromising lives and safety at sea. In short, smuggling of migrants transnational crime requiring a transnational response. Smugglers have successfully managed transcend borders as well language and cultural differences in the commission of their crime; those who would stop them must do likewise 53

It is evident that domestic efforts, concentrated within national borders, are not enough; regional and international cooperation is needed to properly address the question of illegal smuggling of migrants by sea. Measures empower the migrant should be enforced; at the same time, the migrants witnesses against as transnational organized crime must be defended. with appropriate protection programs, such as those provided by United Nations against the Transnational Organized Crime and the supplementing protocols.⁵⁴

Principal Routes of Immigration at Sea

At the beginning of the century, migrations were mainly from Europe to America but they soon started moving towards Africa and Australia. Nowadays, most migrations through the Mediterranean come from sub-

Saharan Africa and move towards UN States, with particular stress on Italian coasts ⁵⁶

The International Centre on Migration Policy Development estimates that between 100,000 and 120,000 migrants cross the Mediterranean each year; most of these people are without necessary documents.⁵⁷

European Union Member States and Schengen Associated Countries reported a total of 104,049 detections of illegal sea and land border crossing in 2010.⁵⁸

The total number of African migrants detected at sea borders in 2008 (within the European Union) was probably between 52,000 and 54,000.⁵⁹

In 2010, migrant flows significantly decreased after peaking in 2008; there were 11,766 arrivals of irregular migrants by sea between January and September of 2010. This number represents a 70% decrease from the previous year.

However, the number of migrants in 2011 increased once again, especially after the political changes resulting from the Libyan conflict.

In particular, there are a series of routes which interest Italy and which must be considered. Some migrants come from the Balkan area and disembark in Puglia. 61 Others come from Turkey, Lebanon and Syria (and in general the western area of the Mediterranean) and also disembark in Syria. 62 Migrants coming from Sri-Lanka and from

the Indian sub-continent disembark in Calabria and western Sicily, while migrants coming from the North African coasts, in particular Tunisia and Libya disembark on the eastern coasts of Sicily, on the Egadi islands, in Pantelleria and in Lampedusa. 63

Other migrants disembark not in Italy but in Malta, which mainly collects migrants coming from the western coasts of the Mediterranean and from North Africa.⁶⁴

There is another important route, which is recently becoming more and more worrying: more and more migrants are trying to emigrate from Senegal to the Canary Islands.⁶⁵

Outside of Europe, there are other important routes worth mentioning: from southwestern Asia towards Australia and from central and south-America towards the USA.⁶⁶

Routes at a Glance: From the Balkan area to Italy

One of the first routes of illegal immigration was that moving from the Balkan area, especially Albania, to Greece and Italy. This became particularly evident in simultaneously with the end of the communist regime of Enver Hoxha, which had segregated the Albanian population from the rest of the world.⁶⁷ Huge flows of immigrants started arriving on the coasts of Brindisi and Bari, fleeing from a situation of political instability, social unrest and extreme economic

poverty. Migration peaked in a short time; it was calculated that from March 1991 to October 1992 about 300,000 people left their home country.⁶⁸

Italy, faced with a huge influx of migrants. adopted contradictory behaviour; in March 1991 Italy accepted a first group of 23,000 Albanian migrants, only repatriate another 20,000 August.⁶⁹ Italian authorities were unprepared to receive and host such a huge number of migrants and this caused political tensions between Italy and Albania.⁷⁰ The came countries finally to agreement according to which Italy would help Albania with substantial financial and alimentary aids.⁷¹

After a calmer period, Albania once again experienced a very sever socio-political crisis which caused a great number of Albanians to emigrate to Italy; in 1997, in the space of a few months, more than 50,000 people disembarked in Puglia.⁷²

Albania once again requested the help of the Italian Government; an agreement was made by an exchange of notes⁷³ according to which Italy agreed to help control illegal migrations by using pushback policies.⁷⁴

However, the situation worsened a couple of years later, due to operations of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo; thousands and thousands of people fleeing from the Balkans disembarked in Italy and asylum requests, which only a couple of years before were approximately 2,000, shot up to 33,000,⁷⁵ an unprecedented number.

By the end of 2000 there were, according to the Italian Ministry of the Interior's sources, 142,066, constituting the second biggest foreign group after Moroccans.⁷⁶

Currently, the inflow of Albanian citizens remains significant. Undocumented migration has not decreased; Estimates in 2006 varied and ranged up to 750,000.

We must remember that Albania has been characterised until recently extreme poverty, the most widespread of any country Europe, the least diversified and most backward economic base. inadequate resources and reluctance of foreigners to invest in the country. Because of disappearing financial and human capital, inadequate fiscal resources, and the reluctance of foreigners to invest in the country⁷⁸ many Albanians feel that illegal immigration is the only way for survival.

Routes at a Glance: From North-Africa to Italy

African immigration became critical following the conflicts and the epidemics that are widely spread in the African continent; AIDS has become the first cause of mortality in the African population in the last 20 years. ⁷⁹ Unfortunately, AIDS affects sub-Saharan Africa more severely than any other region in the world; in 2007, according to the

United Nations reports, there were about 22.5 million HIV-positive persons in Africa. Since 1982, AIDS has claimed the astounding number of 30 million Africans; only in 2007 there were 1.6 million deaths. Malaria, another leading cause of death in Africa, has ben surpassed by AIDS; AIDS kills many more Africans than war does. In the surpassed by AIDS; AIDS was also as a surpassed by AIDS; AIDS was a surpassed by AIDS; AIDS kills many more Africans than war does.

In 2010, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 70% of new HIV infections in 2010, although there was a notable decline of new infections.82 Africa currently has an estimated 5.6 million people living with HIV.83 This amounts approximately to 12% of the world population and also to about 68% of total of infected persons globally.84 Even more worrying is the fact that about 90% of infected children globally live in Africa and about 61% of infected adults are women 85

It is shocking to think that almost half the deaths from AIDS-related illnesses in 2010 occurred in southern Africa (even though AIDS related deaths have steadily decreased since the introduction of free antiretroviral therapy).⁸⁶

According to experts, the severity of Africa's AIDS epidemic is imputable to poverty, lack of female empowerment, high rates of male worker migration and other factors. ⁸⁷ The fact that the national health system is not equipped to prevent, diagnose and treat AIDS decidedly does not help. Because of

this, AIDS causes severe socioeconomic consequences such as decline in economic productivity due to sharp drops in life expectancy and loss of skilled workers.⁸⁸

It also devastates families: 72% of deaths occurs in sub-Saharan Africa because of AIDS-linked diseases and in 2008 there were about 11.4 million African AIDS orphans lacking access to adequate nutrition and social services. 89 AIDS and poverty strengthen and feed each other. 90

1998 was a decisive year as more than a thousand of migrants travelled from Tunisia and Morocco towards Italy, disembarking in Lampedusa, 113 miles away from the Tunisian coast. After a tense period, readmission agreements were signed with both states. 91

Unfortunately, migrant flows have only increased throughout the years; the Mediterranean is often crossed on dangerous, overcrowded boats. Approximately 60,000 people coming from Africa cross Mediterranean each vear. particular, migrants set off from the eastern Libyan coasts, such as Tripoli and Zuwarah and move towards Lampedusa, Sicily and Malta.92 Other routes connect Sousse and Monastir in Tunisia to Lampedusa and Bizerte and Cap Bon to Pantelleria. 93 More migrants come from Egypt and head to Calabria; furthermore, from 2006 a new route has been identified, connecting Algeria to Sardinia.⁹⁴

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