

Alessandro VITALE*

ITALY'S APPROACH TO EAST–WEST AND SOUTH–NORTH MIGRATIONS: FROM LACK OF KNOWLEDGE TO POLITICAL USE OF THEM

Abstract. After the end of the bipolar world, the possibility of an East–West mass migration became a new issue that took root in the Italian consciousness in forms masked by the feelings of the threat of an imminent “mass invasion” from Central and Eastern Europe. This new fear stimulated restrictive measures belatedly adopted in Italy and created a *de facto* unjust and imbalanced condition for new migrants from Eastern Europe because the first South–North migrations’ wave had already occurred when the regimes of Central and Eastern Europe collapsed.

There are many evident similarities between the beliefs, attitudes and the use of insecurity (not based on data) of the 1990s and the current Italian migration policy. What they have in common is the incorrect perception and the misuse of it by politicians and propagandists. Immigration from Eastern Europe continues to be compared to that from the South of the world and Asia which continues to be interpreted without considering their real natures and the actual trends that characterise them. According to new studies that compared survey results with population data, contemporary Italians overestimate the number of immigrants coming from outside the EU to their country more than any other Europeans. As a result, the misuse or ignorance of the data on migrations is particularly dangerous because the devaluation of them has critical implications for policymaking.

Key words: migrations, Italy’s migration policy, borders, propaganda, Eastern Europe.

1. INTRODUCTION

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the liberation of its satellite belt and the collapse of the Central and Eastern European political regimes, the issue of immigration came into a deadlock. Particularly, the possibility of an East–West mass migration became a new issue that took root in the Italian consciousness in the forms masked by feelings of the threat of an imminent “mass invasion” from Cen-

* Alessandro VITALE, University of Milan, Department of International, Legal, Historical and Political Studies, 20122 Milano, Italy; e-mail: alessandro.vitale@unimi.it

tral and Eastern Europe. Although little debated, due also to the lack of knowledge about Central and Eastern Europe that matured during the stasis of the polarised world, this issue has been overestimated. Having freed themselves from the immense prison camp of Soviet domination later than the emergence of the migratory wave from the South (a phenomenon difficult to solve, due to the impracticability of expulsions or strict boundary controls), the citizens of the former Eastern bloc have been likened in Italy – due to a fear for a mass migratory movement – to those that were a totally different threat to the European demographic balance.

This new fear stimulated restrictive measures belatedly adopted in Italy (the strong restrictions adopted in visas, the requirements that must be met to immigrate to Italy, the long queues and night time waiting outside police headquarters, the equalisation of all types of migrants under the same definitions, without any consideration for the different reasons of emigration, etc.) and created a *de facto* unjust and imbalanced condition for new migrants from Eastern Europe because the first South-North migrations' wave already occurred and at that time immigrants from the southern hemisphere had already enjoyed a total absence of restrictions and controls.¹

Moreover, the new restrictive measures, produced by policy-makers' fear and sheer ignorance among about Central and Eastern Europe, had struck hard at the weak beginning of mobility that had been advocated for decades in the West before the crisis of the Eastern bloc – at least verbally, of course, with the rhetoric of “open frontiers” in Europe as a goal to achieve, in order to recreate “historical Europe”. On the contrary, already at that time a careful analysis indicated that a mass East–West migration inside Europe had run its course when the post-polarised world began and with the end of the Cold War. In fact, the migratory pressure (push factor) in Eastern Europe was due to the climate of discrimination and political persecution perpetrated in the Soviet period and an anti-economic system (that is a system without economic calculation, price system, with misallocation of resources, destruction of capital, high level of corruption and so on).²

Nevertheless, the hysteria of a “besieged citadel”, a mirror of the relationship between immigration and insecurity (as immigration becomes the symbol of a condition

¹ A *de facto* discrimination had been developed against the populations of Eastern Europe and their mobility. This came about (although on technical grounds) under the slogan of the principle of equality but in a phase when Eastern European citizens were already in a position of crushing disadvantage with respect to the first extra-European immigrants. The freezing of this situation posed ethical and practical problems of enormous weight as it responded neither to the respecting of human rights nor to the extensive and integral interpretation of the principle of equality, which in practice was violated, nor to the specific needs of exchange and interaction in Europe.

² In 1990, before the break-up of the Soviet Union, the myth of invasion prevailed, in the presence of 1,200,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe, more than half of whom from the USSR (Okolsky, 1990). In that year 16% of Soviet inhabitants expressed the desire to emigrate to the West (Chesnais, 1990). A widespread trend analysis of 1990 predicted definitive departures: between 3 and 20 million persons by the end of 1993.

of expropriation) emerged in fact both from the sudden growth of the global immigration phenomenon in the late-1980s and the perception of the irreversible character of the settlement of the immigrants (which has been effectively predominant in the intentions and practice of immigration from the South).³ A poll held in 1991 illustrated this issue: despite the fact that immigrant residents accounted for less than 1% of the total population of Italy, 78% of Italian respondents felt the number of immigrants was too high while only 43% were aware of the actual size of foreign migration (Mai, 2002).

2. THE EARLY USE OF INSECURITY

Insecurity has reinforced the myth of “invasion”. Since immigration from the East took place at that time, opinion leaders and the media easily consolidated the impression in public opinion of an unstoppable phenomenon, also provoking new policy measures (such as those against Albanian immigration in Southern Italy). At the end of the 1990s, images were formed which foresaw a migration potential of millions of people in Eastern Europe and, above all, in the Soviet Union.⁴ The cause was the elimination of travel restrictions for Soviet citizens through a new law on passports, but also the elimination of the visa requirement for Poles by the Federal Republic of Germany and other countries of the Schengen Group. Development and welfare in Western Europe were considered enormous pull factors for migration from the East. It seems quite curious and even amusing today to remember the past rhetoric on the “Albanian threat”⁵ or about Croatian, Polish, Bosnian or Romanian pressures.

Excluding the Romanian case (even if nowadays this kind of economic immigration is very flexible and mutable), already in the 1990s the temporary character

³ The intention to move permanently, with families and reunifications, was expressed in particular by North Africans. In 1991, there were about 350,000 irregular migrants in Italy. The collapse of the Soviet Union had affected the development of the Schengen Area. (Zincone and Caponio, 2006, pp. 1–20). The myth of “invasion” was fuelled also by the situation in Poland (see Kasic and Triandafyllidou, 2004) and after the landing of 35,000 Albanian asylum seekers in Apulia, in just a few months in 1991.

⁴ Estimates of ILO expected 25–30 million newly unemployed in the Soviet Union and the UN High Commissioner for refugees considered a magnitude of 25 million refugees from all over Eastern Europe as possible (Kruse and Schwarz, 1991).

⁵ Albanians were particularly vilified as a group, for a long time having occupied the “least desirable” category in the hierarchy of immigrant groups in Italy. The supposed criminality of Albanians offered a justification for Italian fears, prejudice and negative stereotypes. Their first mass landing led to a public debate linking immigration with crime for the first time (Bontempelli, 2009). That poor political debate was completely beside the fact that Albanian immigration to the United States was one of the most dignified and least inclined to public subsidies, which they considered as not worthy of free men.

of that migration was quite clear.⁶ However, that conviction gave rise to instances of open cynicism: as it happened regarding the Bosnian refugees in Italy, despite the clear example of the Croatians who returned to their homeland when the Serbian aggression ended. Already at that time (as it happens today) there was the refusal of the obligation to give temporary hospitality to refugees from war-torn countries. At the same time immigration pressure from the South had still been encouraged in many cases by the reuniting of families, some members of which were already present illegally in Italy. The advocates of a priority for the “old” immigration (from the South of the Mediterranean Sea) emphasised, together with those in favour of multiculturalism, the personal relations and the preservation and improvement of the status of immigrants and especially of family reunification.⁷

For Italy, a southern orientation towards immigration had continued before the end of the 1990s, since immigration from the south had begun earlier. Moreover, the legislative and administrative measures restricting immigration later adopted in Italy (including a strong immigration policy, the indiscriminate limitation of granting visas, even if accommodation and work were guaranteed, the confused regulations⁸ and their arbitrary application even regarding intellectuals who held official invitations, in a hostile political climate) and the boundaries which remained locked, were not only superfluous with regard to Eastern Europe (as they corresponded to a trend analysis, probably even ignored by political class, dating back to 1990, before the disintegration of the Soviet Union), but also became disruptive in Europe, causing problems, many of which still unsolved.⁹

⁶ Emigration from Eastern and Balkan Europe for a limited period was well explained by the populations’ attachment to their land (e.g. to Orthodox Slavs it is “sacred”), by their tenacious will to recover their own culture, to reconstruct a vital space devastated by decades of anti-ethnic, homogenizing centralist policies, and, in the 1990s, by the enthusiasm of the rebirth of the “small homelands” liberated from the imperial yoke and handed back linguistic and cultural autonomy. The past tendency to stop in countries of emigration after the Second World War was mainly due to economic reasons but has never had a mass character. Actually, already in the 1990s there was a clear trend towards the decrease of the pull factor from Eastern and Balkan Europe. Western Europe was a source of attraction-repulsion, a place where it is hard to adjust to living.

⁷ Using simplified immigration procedures for family members, an option to return to the host country, dual citizenship and free movement.

⁸ Only in 1990 the Parliament approved the so-called “Martelli Law”, which regulated immigration. It redefined refugee status, solidified and specified the procedures for refusal of entry for undocumented migrants and clarified expulsion procedures. For the first time it introduced the programming of migrant flows from abroad (through the introduction of quotas): a measure that only partially would take into account the needs of the Italian labour market. Moreover, this law envisaged amnesty through which self-employed workers could be legalised. But the immigration from the East was only beginning then. (Veugelers, 1994).

⁹ All of Europe is still strongly supporting the anti-historical and “unnatural” separation among European cultures of a common matrix which has lasted all too long. The effect has been that of isolating populations finding it impossible to recover their own European or semi-European identity (such as Russia – as demonstrated in the large amount of data collected by the Levada Center – or the exclusion of Western Balkans), which caused a permanent nostalgia for the previous regimes and the rethinking of “intra-continental conflicts” (imperial nationalism, “anti-Westernism” and so on).

Freezing the effects of the polarised world, legislative measures prolonged them. Rather than basing laws on objective and actual demographic trends, on the identification of migratory potentials and of populations most likely to want to leave (taking into consideration the authentic origin of migratory movements),¹⁰ on the supports bases abroad (previous diasporas) on which a new immigration could rely (destinations of the movements), on the historical cycles and destinations, the stereotypical repetition of the invasion myth prevailed. Moreover, for certain Italian areas and regions closure included even absurd aspects: for example, the long exclusion of the Danube area from contacts with the Lombardy-Veneto region, historically with a strong connection. But the Italian political class still has not realised the uselessness of restrictions of the 1990s against the immigration from Eastern Europe and the long-term harm caused by the adopted measures.

3. ITALY'S CURRENT WAR ON MIGRANTS AND POLITICAL USE OF MIGRATIONS

There are many obvious similarities between the convictions, attitudes and the use of insecurity (not based on data) of the 1990s and the current Italian migration policy. What they have in common is the incorrect perception and the misuse of it by politicians and propagandists.

Five million foreign nationals are currently living and legally residing in Italy, which is equivalent to around 8.3% of Italy's population of 60.5 million. The biggest grouping of migrants come from Romania, accounting for just under a quarter of the total figure, or 23%. Another 9% came from Albania but they diminished considerably. 8% are Moroccan, 5.5% are Chinese and 4.5 came from Ukraine, mainly employed in retail, farming or domestic work. According to a migration study conducted by the ISMU Foundation (ISMU 2018), there are some 500,000 people living in Italy illegally, equivalent to 0.9% of the population, among them asylum seekers and those who have overstayed their visas. Figures from the International Organization for Migration show that around 120,000 immigrants arrived in Italy by sea in 2017. A considerable segment of illegal immigration to Italy, particularly from North Africa but also of Sub-Saharan origin, uses routes through Southern Europe in order to reach the northern part of Europe. Following a new

¹⁰ Wars, persecution of minorities and extreme poverty (push factor) impacted Italian immigration heavily throughout the 1980s and after the breakdown of the polarised world. The great streams of immigrants from African countries accounted for 20.3% of total immigration to Italy in 1989, originating from Morocco, Tunisia and Senegal, joining other national groups already in the country, mostly Eritreans, Somalis, Egyptians and the citizens of various South American nations governed by dictatorships at the time.

deal which was signed in summer 2017, the number of migrants reaching Italian shores in the first five months of 2018 amounted to 13,808 – down by 84% in the same period a year prior. The fact that Italy is still the major destination for asylum seekers arriving by boats does not mean that this country is the main target of current migrations.

According to new studies that compared survey results with population data, nowadays Italians overestimate the number of immigrants coming from outside the EU to their country more than any other Europeans. While Italians believe that immigrants make up 25% of Italy's total population, the real figure is under 8%. That makes for a "perception error" of 17.4%. Italians score the highest misperception of immigrant numbers. Arrivals by the sea were in 2018 almost 80% lower than they were in 2017. No other European country showed such a wide gap.¹¹ This is obviously a fertile soil for political propaganda which prefers to ignore the statistics and survey data and promises to end migrant arrivals, adopting a hard line on immigration which includes the promise to deport hundreds of thousands of people who do not have permission to stay in the country.¹² The same applies to propaganda which accuses immigrants of committing a disproportionate number of crimes.¹³ This misperception is unavoidably related to hostility towards immigrants. Experts agree that the current political climate is fuelling intolerance, in a society that is becoming even more polarised over the issues of migration and citizenship, due to the use of fear and the misuse¹⁴ (or voluntary ignorance) of scientific studies on immigration, all in a *vacuum* of knowledge. The main problems

¹¹ Western Europeans vary in their perceptions of immigration. Among other EU Member States, the closest to Italy were Portugal (14.6%), Spain (14.4%) and the UK (12.8%). At the other end of the scale Croatia (0.1%), Sweden (0.3%), and Denmark (2.2 %) gave the least inflated estimates of immigrant numbers. Only Estonians underestimate the number of immigrants in their country (by 1.1%) (Istituto Cattaneo (2018)). Germans estimated the unemployment rate among immigrants at 40%, while the true figure is less than 8%.

¹² Italy spent hundreds of thousands of euros of EU funds (at least 200,000 euros, 90% of that journey's cost was paid by Brussels) to escort *Aquarius* migrant boat to Spain after refusing it permission to land at Italian ports for a sixth day in a row. More than 600 refugees and migrants (mostly Eritrean) were left stranded at sea in a four-day standoff until Spain agreed to accept the boat at Valencia. They were refused permission to disembark in the Italian port of Catania, Sicily. This propaganda coup must be considered the highest level reached by politicians in the misuse of data, facts and figures about immigration. This case-study not only helped to restore a distorted perception of the facts and made reality of immigration indistinguishable from political propaganda, but it has been responsible of considerable worsening of relations among European countries. The case of sending back to Italy from Germany, as a result of the Dublin agreement, is a possible future in this respect.

¹³ This trend began in 1997, when suddenly in August two or three crimes, whose perpetrators were foreigners, were an opportunity for a campaign of alarm and panic. (Dal Lago, 2004, pp. 27–28).

¹⁴ The media's and especially social media's representations of immigration are the primary sources based on which Italians formulate their ideas about immigrants. The role of social media in creating the image of migrations as a broad threat is substantial, especially among young people. The traditional media influence mostly old people.

concerning immigration clearly stem from the political process of polarisation, creating competition between “national” and “non-national”, even in the presence of the so-called “new Italians”, a generation who have been denied citizenship despite being born in Italy, living all their lives in the country and speaking fluent Italian or even regional dialects. Italy still has some of the most severe requirements in the EU regarding citizenship acquisition.¹⁵ Combined with harsh and draconian immigration laws, Italian citizenship law limits in a very real way the actual integration of immigrants, reinforcing the sentiment of the majority of the population. Citizenship laws provide for ever-greater delays and much more restrictive conditions than in the past, creating in migrants the idea of a hostile and inhospitable country and a sense of extraneousness.¹⁶ But what is even worse, the bureaucracy of permits pushes asylum seekers into the limbo of waiting. So, immigrants permanently sink into the abyss of irregularity if they do not receive the permission. As a result, they become, in all respects, “illegal men”, condemned to life on the margins of the civil society. The closure of borders and the denial of rights to migrants, whether they are regular or not, are two sides of the same coin in the mismanagement of migration.

Italians have perceived immigration to represent a significant problem, regardless of actual numbers and percentage of immigrants in relation to Italian-born citizens. In the country, there is a real war being silently waged between Italians and migrants, who – whether legal or illegal – now live and work in Italy. A wave of hatred stirred against Africans, who very often have already been living in the country for some time, underpaid and even often living in conditions of enslavement, especially in the South. Italians are going backwards in community terms, amid an upsurge of nationalism that is growing together with discrimination and the refusal of anything perceived to be an alien body. Popular support for governments who advocate severe approaches to dealing with the immigration problem illustrates how tolerance for immigrants has actually decreased in the wake of harsher laws. Political parties just do not tolerate the phenomenon of migration and exploit it politically. The most widespread slogan among politicians is: “Italy cannot be Europe’s refugee camp”. The government’s project is to expel hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants. In fact, politicians failed to address the phenomenon of irregular immigration in a structural way, as they were characterised

¹⁵ Especially the Law decree no. 92 of 2008 established newer and tighter norms concerning both undocumented migrants and foreign citizens sentenced to more than two years in prison, including EU nationals. The next step in Italian migration policies was the Law no. 94 of 2009, with which the government introduced the “crime of clandestine immigration”. Among some of the measures undertaken in the name of “increasing security”, illegal immigration was criminalised and was made punishable by detention, deportation and/or fines. Italians themselves can face legal action if they knowingly provide services or house illegal immigrants.

¹⁶ On integration policies in Italy, Caneva (2014); Finotelli (2018); Scipioni (2018); Grzymala-Kazłowska (2018); Caritas Italiana (2019).

by measures aimed mainly at tackling emergency situations. “Zero-landing” policies have been attempted by all Italian governments, using similar strategies and ending in identical failures: an empty discourse on migrations, TV talk shows full of victimisation, and resentment against richer Northern European countries and illegal migration, financing of Libyan mafias to be jailers patrolling inhumane detention camps for sub-Saharan migrants.¹⁷ Although there is a tendency for governments in the EU to adopt a restrictive approach towards immigration and asylum seekers, because large parts of the European voters hold latent anti-immigrant attitudes (Howard, 2010; Alonso and Claro da Fonseca, 2012), some voters are generally more open to receiving larger numbers of refugees than others. In Italy those attitudes have been variable and instable but when there emerged electorally significant right-wing populist parties (Kitschelt, 1997, pp. 4–19), voters began to demand more restrictive policies. But in fact, there is no difference between a centre-left government’s approach to migration and that of a right-wing approach. That is because right-wing populists were able to expand their voter bases at the expense of the government and other “moderate” political parties. By mobilising voters with anti-immigrant preferences and blaming the government for its lenient policies towards immigration, they exerted pressure on the government which in response adopted similar positions and implemented policies that aimed to minimise the intake of asylum seekers, in order not to lose voter support (as already described by Massey, 1999, p. 313). Thus, the main trend in Italy, as in several European countries, is to consider a zero-migration option.¹⁸

Every migration policy ended with an amnesty and normalisation of thousands of immigrants. Indeed, the *fil rouge* that blinds all Italian migration policies is the use of *sanatorie* (amnesties). Various Italian governments normalised the legal status of 1.7 million once irregular immigrants and workers. Moreover, Italy’s external policies of the last decade have shown a conspicuous lack of consistency. Paradoxically, “populist” governments are benefiting from the restrictive policies their opponents had implemented. At the same time, it has also happened that the Italian people and governments have indicated in groups and categories of people, gathered on the basis of prejudices and stereotypes, real objectives to be struck, so as to

¹⁷ Any change in the numbers coming from North Africa will largely depend on the stabilisation efforts in Libya and the persistence of the controversial deal between Rome and the authorities and militias there which have slashed arrivals.

¹⁸ Despite the fact that a continuous stream of migrants cannot be a complement (or a substitute) to the decline of births, and its aggregate growth is not an automatic consequence (because it depends on the skills of the migrants and their employability according to the requirements of the labour market), and migrants may even weigh negatively on per capita income, the zero-migration option would be a serious danger for Italy because its population would decline rapidly due to the decline of fertility (the worst in Europe), the extension of the retirement age, the considerable aging of the working population that will depress productivity and the rate of innovation (Skirbekk, 2008). Working-age population will decline more rapidly than the population in general (see Livi Bacci, 2018, pp. 696–697). In Italy, immigrants are a growing proportion in the labour force, particularly in agriculture.

allow the frustrations to find vent by identifying enemies to be persecuted.¹⁹ Various surveys showed an alarming expansion of hate speech in direct parallel to instances of stereotyping and manipulative misrepresentations of foreigners in the media.²⁰

Based on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, according to which descent and not place of birth is the relevant factor for political citizenship, all those not of Italian descent are lumped under the term “*extracomunitari*” (extra-EU citizens), which covers not only asylum seekers and first generation guest workers but also their descendants. The logic of “othering” (Van Houtum, 2002; Van Houtum and Pijpers, 2007; Vitale, 2011) and the building of a potential enemy are quite clear and are functional to the reinforcement of internal politics, the consensus²¹ and national cohesion among the Italian population. The construction of a threat as “moral panic”, the idea of “national insecurity” stirred by “boat people” as a pervasive threat to Italian security have been used by politicians to justify the implementation of a permanent “emergency” measure towards them. In fact, the ever-new adoptions of highly restrictive measures depending on the “urgency” of the situation itself are a clear demonstration of the government’s own incapacity to address the issue of migration and to conform to its obligations under the international law of human rights. Obviously, the huge numbers of poor people, suffering and angry Italians because of the recession (as it is well known, anti-migration feelings increase in periods of depression and decrease in periods of expansion) will not improve their own situation by mobilising against migrants. Nonetheless, misperceptions have created a widespread support for policies that stop immigration. It is obvious also that the lack of a truly European approach has impacted the Italian government’s failure to address this issue.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the Italian immigration debate facts no longer seem to matter. Politicians shape public perception on immigration ignoring the facts, trends (for example the migrants’ intention to expatriate to the countries of Northern Europe) or bending the numbers to fit their stories. This is quite curious in a time of widespread access to accurate and widely available data. Even if this problem is not unique to Italy, in

¹⁹ In 2018, there have been at least 33 violent attacks against immigrants. Journalists have mapped over 30 racist physical assaults: an average of one every two days, beginning from 1 June 2018, the day the new government was sworn in.

²⁰ See Camera dei Deputati, *The pyramid of hate in Italy*. Final Report (2016). For new data, see also www.euronews.com/2019/06/12/hate-crimes-in-italy-quadrupled-between-2017-and-2018; see also www.lunaria.org/il-razzismo-nel-2018-on-line-il-nostro-nuovo-focus/ and Sanguinetti N., Poletto F., Bosco C., Patti V. and Stranisci M. (2016).

²¹ Centre-right coalition government (the second government led by Silvio Berlusconi) had built part of its consensus on anti-immigration rhetoric in 2004.

this country the dominant political discourse has become increasingly detached from reality and much more than in other European countries. Despite the fact that the number of irregular crossings between Germany and Austria has plummeted, it has not stopped the phenomenon from sparking a political crisis in Berlin and Brussels. The Italian political discourse remains dominated by the idea that NGO rescue operations are a significant *pull factor*. Sceptical voices are dismissed as uninformed and the temptation to hide behind figures has become permanent, facilitating the rise of populist rhetoric and leaders who promised to end the migration crisis once and for all without the European Union.

The misuse or ignorance of data on migrations is particularly dangerous because its rejection has critical implications for policymaking and planning. Mistakes can stimulate an “overfinancing” of asylum and migration processes,²² stimulating even more alarm among people. This is an evident direct reflection of the pressure generated by politicians who only consider closing external borders, despite the fact that a long-term solution requires above all attention to integrating immigrants already living in a country. Political narratives on immigration stimulate loud voices calling for radical solutions to perceived problems, often detached from facts because they are particularly attractive to voters, playing into their fears and presenting the action of someone who takes charge and fixes the current situation. Not surprisingly, the political response is highly polarising. Tapping into fears is easier and politically much more productive than suggesting finding viable and consensual solutions. “Counter-narratives” are important for presenting a sceptical analysis based on facts and real numbers of immigrants. In Italy, the government’s decision appears to be a clear signal of the intent of the voters. The appeal of the idea that Italy should close its borders to migrants is very influential and especially the narrative that, having caused many of Italy’s socio-economic problems, migration is the most urgent problem which the country faces. Moreover, this kind of policy stimulates contrasts among bordering countries (Italy and France, Italy and Austria or Germany or Malta²³ and so on: initially accusing them of having

²² In the EU’s Multiannual Financial Framework, the European Commission has proposed a nearly tripling of the amount of money devoted to asylum and migration, from 13 billion to 35 billion euros. http://ec.europa.eu/budget/mff/index_en.cfm; <https://concordeurope.org/what-we-do/promoting-civil-society-space/eu-budget-mff-2021-2027/> while funds for securing the EU’s external borders will nearly quadruple – from 5.6 to 21.3 billion euros; money devoted to integration (which is essential for a long-term policy and management of immigrants) will most likely remain at current levels.

²³ Malta hosts the second-highest number of refugees per capita in the EU – 18.3 per 1,000 inhabitants (after Sweden: 20.3 per 1,000). Austria hosts the third-highest number of refugees per capita in the EU (10.7 per 1,000 inhabitants. Italy actually hosts only 2.4 per 1,000. Although the Dublin III Regulation clearly failed, the refugee quota system represents a case of unsuccessful EU policymaking and the EU has not been able to agree on a fair distribution of immigrants and refugees, Italy’s official position in this respect is quite curious. Although Italy is an important first entry point for many asylum seekers, it must be considered a transit country (Costello and Mouzourakis, 2016) and it receives a comparatively small share of asylum application in relation to its national population (Zaun, 2017, p. 221).

motivated asylum seekers to come to Europe through their temporary open borders and at the end of closing their borders to refugees and refusing relocations of migrants) reinforcing the role of national borders (with the suspensions of the Schengen regime and destructively challenging the practice of freedom of movement in Europe without border controls) and having serious implications for Italy's domestic policy and for the relations with neighbouring countries and the broader EU. Slow proceedings of international agreements and the many divisions within the European Union make it difficult to actually enforce the new measures to tackle the problem of immigration. Italy preferred permanent refugee quotas over the current Dublin system, but the government took a less active role in the negotiations compared to Austria, Germany and Sweden. Far from leading substantive reforms, Rome's line on immigration risks deepening the rift in the EU, often siding with EU Member States and non-Member States that, in terms of migration, had often worked against Italian "national interest" (e.g. supporting the legitimacy of strong rebordering of neighbouring countries). Moreover, with a quota system for relocation, declared as unavoidable by Italian governments, the current top recipient countries would no longer have incentives to engage in the protection of EU's external borders, considered by Central and Eastern European countries their key priority (Zaun, 2017, p. 56). What is clear is the permanent dichotomy of Italian migration policies addressing irregular immigration, with internal policies and often opposite external ones, characterised by variability and instability.

The possibility for minorities to enjoy the benefit of integration can collapse very quickly facing a destructive nationalism and a rigid mentality, indifferent to numbers and bare reality. Calm public discourse still offers plenty of room for data and facts. Experts need to use them more incisively, using the media accurately and compassionately. The changes of the last few years on the world scale will have a direct impact on the immigration policy outlook and development but a consequent policy is still far from a coherent solution to new problems and challenges.

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