

LET US WRITE TOGETHER A NEW NARRATIVE ON MIGRANTS

Ever since the birth of the Conte-I Government in June 2018, when Matteo Salvini ruled for fourteen months unchallenged at the building of the Internal Affairs Ministry (the Viminale) in disregard of all rules and with the complicity of the Five Stars ministers, we have intensified on our newsletter (www.movimentoeuropeo.it) the counter-information action on migration policies in Italy and Europe.

With regard to Italy, we emphasised at the same time the humanitarian approach of the Coast Guard headed by Admiral Giovanni Pettorino, Commanding General of the Harbours from February 2018 to July 2021, which has consistently acted in compliance with international Conventions and European rules for rescuing people in the Mediterranean in continuity with Operation *Mare Nostrum*.

To be fair, it is worth mentioning that the policy of disregard for all international and European rules was initiated with the agreements signed and implemented by Interior Minister Marco Minniti between 12 December 2016 and 1st June 2018 with all the factions in power in Libya through the project '*Support to integrated Border and migration management in Libya*' (abbreviated as *Sibmmil*) - disgracefully and blindly co-financed by the European Union - included in the framework of the Italian Trust Fund for Africa.

'Thanks' to this project, Italy has for years sold patrol boats to the Libyan police - acting within the framework of the General Administration for Coastal Security and the Directorate for Combating Immigration - who have benefited from familiarisation courses on how to operate them, including through the use of '*metal lockers suitable for the storage of weapons*'.

Italy has thus allowed Libya to intercept tens of thousands of migrants and refugees at sea for years in Libyan but also in international waters and then subject them to abuse, exploitation, arbitrary detention and torture in the so-called reception centres in that country, as has been denounced several times by the UN 'Independent Mission on Libya'.

The Protocol signed in November 2023 between Giorgia Meloni's Italy and Edi Rama's Albania - a country that hopes for its swift entry into the EU family - is apparently different from the complicity between the Italian government and Libyan factions that has never stopped from 2016 to the present day as Giorgia Meloni's recent trip to Tripoli shows.

The Italo-Albanian Protocol shares with the Italo-Libyan connivance and also with the Italo-Tunisian and Italo-Egyptian agreements the perverse will to manage migration policies in the logic of rejections towards the countries of origin of migrants or asylum seekers or towards the so-called 'safe' countries - which Italy has indicated in violation of European criteria - in the belief that these policies will defeat human trafficking and

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smugglers by forcing those fleeing wars, from ethnic and religious conflicts, hunger, environmental disasters and land expropriation to stay 'at home'.

The policy of reject is now and unfortunately prevailing in all European governments without exception including the British one under both Conservative and Labour leadership because governments are driven by populist impulses and the growth of far-right movements to act against the belief of a hypothetical invasion of asylum seekers.

This policy is applied not only to the fight against illegal or irregular migration but also to regular migratory flows, i.e. so-called economic migrants together with asylum seekers, with a mixture of the two categories that violates international standards starting with the Geneva Convention and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has also joined the policy of rejections, making it one of the main priorities of her strategy and her alliance with the securitarian logic that prevails in the European Council.

Over the past twelve years, the number of refugees or asylum seekers has grown continuously, reaching a record of one hundred and twenty million worldwide in May 2024 according to UN data.

According to Eurostat data, asylum seekers in EU countries exceeded one million in 2023 alone, an increase of 20% compared to 2022 and 69% in Italy with the arrival of the Meloni government, growing mainly from Egypt and Tunisia with destination Germany (31.4%), Spain (15.3%), France (13.8%) and Italy (12.4%) despite the bilateral agreements with these two countries, but with a high percentage (48.0%) of asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey, Venezuela and Colombia without calculating the temporary protection granted to Ukrainians.

On the other hand, the number of arrivals from sub-Saharan Africa, where the movements of fleeing populations mainly take place within the countries or in neighbouring countries, is very low, representing for Italy a percentage that does not exceed 25%.

Out of one million asylum seekers, the European Union granted refugee, subsidiary protection and humanitarian status to 410,000 refugees in 2023, mainly from Syria (32%), Afghanistan (18%) and Venezuela (10%), i.e. less than half of the arrivals via the Central Mediterranean and Balkan routes.

The increase in asylum seekers from 2022 onwards is caused by the deterioration of the socio-economic situation, the effects of Russia's aggression against Ukraine with the rise in the price of grain, the rise in the inflation rate, and, from 7 October 2023, the consequences of the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel and the military escalation of the Netanyahu government in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon.

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The EU institutions, on the other hand, are blind and deaf to the dramatic state of extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, which has grown in recent years due to pandemics, disastrous endemic conditions of childhood, environmental disasters, and the extension of autocracies, a poverty made invisible by the falling world poverty rate.

This is a blindness and deafness that ignores the colonialist role of China and Russia along with the prediction that in 2050 Africa will account for 25% of the world's population and over two billion inhabitants with an average age of less than 25 years, with a tendentially positive development potential for the European Union provided that everyone has access to education and that school exclusion and learning poverty are combated by investing in new generations and in democratic and therefore effective systems of governance.

All this makes it urgent and necessary to look at the issue of migration with other eyes and other policies, imagining virtuous circles of socio-economic development that benefit local populations and the entire international community.

Only in this way will we be able to get away from the perverse and bankrupt logic of closing borders and 'externalisation' models imagined in different ways by EU governments and the European Commission by reversing the approach of the Pact on Migration signed by the Council and the European Parliament on 20 December 2023 before it becomes operational in June 2026 by replacing Directive 2013/32 by considering, among other things, countries with non-secure parts of their territory as safe.

This requires an international mobilisation of social partners and non-governmental organisations representing civil society acting in the territories of origin of asylum seekers and migratory flows.

It is necessary to start from the United Nations because the issue of population movements concerns the whole planet and not only the European Union by launching a strong European initiative that overturns the logic of rejections and externalisations, extends the method of work corridors as a further step of the humanitarian corridors and demands that the issue of migration policies be part of the 'Pact for the Future' and the 'Declaration on Future Generations'.

Rome, 21 October 2024