Introduction

When studying migration control regimes, it is important to distinguish between the internal and external dimensions. While internal control policies are concerned with migrants who are already within a country’s territory, external control policies target migrants at the border or outside the border before their arrival (Caponio and Cappiali 2018; Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011). Concerning external migration controls, governments’ main challenge is facilitating the legitimate movement of individuals while maintaining secure borders. In this respect, border management aims at ensuring ‘that movement deemed beneficial […] is unimpeded; while unwanted movement […] is blocked’ (Hansen and Papademetriou 2014: 2). From this perspective, secure borders are those that are free of unauthorized and other unwanted movements of individuals. Therefore, an effective border-control policy should be able to strike a balance between these two aspects (namely, legitimate movement of migrants and security) so that security aims do not outweigh humanitarian objectives at the risk of violating refugee and asylum seekers’ rights.

This chapter focuses on border management and external migration controls in Italy and investigates the role of narratives in policy-making between 2011 and 2018. Border management is defined here as the ensemble of legislation, institutions, actors, and policy implementation practices concerned with defining, conceptualizing, and policing borders (Karamanidou and Kasparek 2018). In this regard, narratives are crucial in disseminating and articulating ideas that specify the problems at stake in border management and what to do to solve them. As such, narratives and argumentation constitute an important factor in the process of designing border-control policies.

In presenting the leading institutions and actors involved in implementing external migration control measures in Italy, the chapter first identifies the key issues at stake—namely, the ‘hotspot approach’ and the externalization of border controls. Secondly, I trace the dominant policy narratives conveyed by key decision-makers in government. In so doing, I point to the
discursive blend of humanitarianism and securitization underpinning Italy’s externalization strategy.

In terms of policy implications, the chapter argues that blocking the migratory flows in the countries of origin or transit—preventing migrants from seeking asylum—should not be seen as the primary goal of the overall border management policy. The Italian externalization strategy has, in fact, been mainly focused on limiting cross-border flows of migrants and, therefore, the legitimate movement of individuals seeking asylum. Moreover, Italy should reinforce the ‘legal channels’ for asylum seekers to access the Italian asylum system.

The chapter is organized as follows. The following section defines the concept of ‘policy narrative’ and briefly reviews the main academic literature on narratives and migration governance. Section 3 illustrates the methods as well as the sources of empirical material. In section 4, the key features of the Italian border management and external migration control policy between 2011 and 2018 are presented. Section 5 traces the dominant narratives that decision-makers have developed during the period under consideration. Finally, section 6 discusses the main findings and formulates policy recommendations.

Narratives and migration governance

In his seminal work Evidence, Argument, and Persuasion in the Policy Process, Giandomenico Majone (1989) developed the idea that argumentation plays a central role in all stages of the policy process, setting the premises for an argumentative turn in public policy analysis (Fischer 2017; Fischer and Forester 1993). Against this backdrop, ‘narrative’ is a crucial analytical concept to grasp the discursive construction of public policy.

In the past several decades, the role of narratives in public policy-making has been widely discussed (Acosta et al. 2019; Blum and Kuhlmann 2019; Dudley 2013; van Eeten 2007; Esposito, Terlizzi, and Crutzen 2020; Fischer and Forester 1993; Jones, Shanahan, and McBeth 2014; Oppermann and Spencer 2016; Quaglia and Howarth 2018; Radaelli 1999; Shanahan et al. 2018; Sievers and Jones 2020; Stone 1989, 2012). The study of narratives relates to analysing ideas and the construction and dissemination of knowledge (Haas 2004; Radaelli 1995; Yee 1996). As argued by Hall (1993: 279), ‘policy-makers customarily work within a framework of ideas […] that is embedded in the very terminology through which policymakers communicate about their work’. Ideas can be defined as causal beliefs that specify cause-and-effect relationships, elucidate the issues at stake, and prescribe what to do to
solve them (Campbell 2004). So conceived, ideas encompass both the process of issue interpretation and the elaboration of solutions. Ideas constitute the substantive content of discourse, which can be defined as the interactive process through which ideas are conveyed in institutional contexts (Schmidt 2008). Crucial to discourse is the concept of agency. In fact, following Schmidt (2008), agency can be conceived as the actions taken by actors in the form of discursive practices through which they strategically mobilize their arguments. As we shall see, the notion of policy narrative makes the concepts of ideas and discourse empirically viable.

In migration studies, the role of narratives has been extensively explored (Boswell 2011; Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten 2011; Carling and Hernández-Carretero 2011; D’Amato and Lucarelli 2019; Gianfreda 2018; Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017; Korkut, Terlizzi, and Gyollai 2020; Steinhilper and Grujters 2018). By focusing on the management of unauthorized maritime migration from West Africa to Spain, Carling and Hernández-Carretero (2011) show how policy measures based on direct control, deterrence and dissuasion relate to dominant policy narratives centred on security, cooperation and protection of migrants’ lives. In particular, it is shown how narratives underlying the need to protect migrants are, in effect, rhetorical tools to justify the implementation of security and control measures (see also Korkut, Terlizzi, and Gyollai 2020). Attention has also been paid to whether policy narratives are evidence-based. For example, in the field of border controls, several researchers have challenged the dominant deterrence-policy narrative based on the argument that Search and Rescue (SAR) operations constitute a ‘pull factor’ for irregular migration. Specifically, the mere presence of rescue boats is a factor leading to more sea-crossings. In fact, there is no empirical evidence supporting the ‘pull-factor hypothesis’ (Cusumano and Villa 2019, 2021; Heller and Pezzani 2017; Steinhilper and Grujters 2018).

Moving from narratives in policy-making to media narratives, research has highlighted the stereotyped interpretations of refugee and asylum issues that help to shape the audience’s understanding of the so-called ‘2015 refugees crisis’ (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017), as well as the increasing normalization of extreme and anti-immigrant claims in European national newspapers (D’Amato and Lucarelli 2019). Referring to the Italian case, Ceccorulli (2019) argues that mainstream media narratives—especially vis-à-vis the Mare Nostrum operation—have overlooked the actors directly involved in the crisis (migrants and local actors engaged with the reception system). This oversight has contributed to a misrepresentation of the phenomenon—namely, an overemphasis on the negative consequences of migration. More-

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1 Definitions of ideas abound in the literature (for a review, see, for example, Campbell 2002).
over, while a humanitarian narrative was present in the media, this was mainly focused on victimizing migrants—instead of insisting on the need to protect their rights—and it was also used to support securitarian arguments.

This chapter focuses on narratives conveyed in migration policy-making processes. Through narratives, policy-makers articulate and make sense of complexity and uncertainty, provide justificatory arguments to legitimize decisions, and strategically shape opinions with the aim of controlling policy agendas (Acosta et al. 2019; Crow and Jones 2018; Majone 1989; Sievers and Jones 2020). Therefore, for the purpose of this chapter, policy narratives are defined as the set of arguments that decision-makers construct and mobilize to influence policy choices and establish the assumptions for policy-making in the face of high uncertainty and complexity. Echoing Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten (2011), I conceive of policy narratives as comprising two sets of arguments concerned with 1) the policy issue to be addressed and; 2) how the identified policy measures will solve the issue.

Methods and data

Empirical evidence provided in this chapter is mainly drawn from official central government documents, parliamentary committees reports, reports by both governmental and non-governmental institutions, speeches by national decision-makers, and interviews with experts, key interlocutors, and decision-makers. The period under consideration is 2011–2018.

Concerning the analysis of policy narratives, I place particular focus on speeches and statements delivered in institutional contexts—mainly parliamentary speeches—by government actors. Text data have been analysed through qualitative content analysis using NVivo software. The empirical material was systematically interpreted and translated into categories of a coding frame. A combination of induction and deduction has generated categories identifying the key narratives over border management and external migration control. An inductive approach makes it possible for categories to emerge from the data (data-driven) and to then group them into categories deductively derived from theory (concept-driven) (Schreier 2012).

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2 Mainly the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
3 Between 2011 and 2018, there were five governments: the Berlusconi government (centre-right, May 2008–November 2011), the Monti government (technocratic, November 2011–April 2013), the Letta government (grand coalition, April 2013–February 2014), the Renzi government (centre-left, February 2014–December 2016), and the Gentiloni government (centre-left, December 2016–June 2018). The Conte I government (populist, June 2018–September 2019) was not included in the analysis since it just took office when the data collection and analysis started.
Therefore, the coding strategy consisted of two rounds. In the first round of coding, categories were generated inductively. In the second round, those categories were grouped into macro-categories derived from key concepts we find in the literature on migration governance (Table 6.1). Text pointing to the need to collaborate with and provide assistance to African countries was grouped into the macro-category ‘externalization’, which refers to those ‘extraterritorial state actions to prevent migrants, including asylum seekers, from entering the legal jurisdictions or territories of destination countries’ (Frelick, Kysel, and Podkul 2016: 193). Those segments of text referring to the need to save migrant’s lives and protect their human rights were grouped into the macro-category labelled ‘humanitarianism’, which encompasses those activities ‘intended to relieve suffering, stop preventable harm, save lives at risk, and improve the welfare of vulnerable populations’ (Barnett 2013: 383). Text passages referring to the fight against illegal immigration and the smuggling of migrants were grouped into the ‘securitization’ macro-category. Finally, text stressing the need to redistribute responsibilities between member states, strengthen collaboration with the EU, and reform the Dublin Regulation⁴ was grouped into the macro-category ‘EU solidarity’.

Table 6.1. Coding frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inductively generated categories (data-driven)</th>
<th>Macro-categories (concept-driven)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Need to collaborate with African countries</td>
<td>Externalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need to provide assistance to African countries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Saving migrants’ lives</td>
<td>Humanitarianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Protect human rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need to fight against illegal immigration</td>
<td>Securitization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need to fight against the smuggling of migrants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need for a fair distribution of responsibilities between member states (burden-sharing)</td>
<td>EU solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need for intense and comprehensive collaboration with the EU</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need to change/abandon the Dublin Regulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁴ According to the Dublin Regulation, the member state responsible for examining an asylum application is the one through which the asylum seeker first entered the EU (for details, see Ibrido and Terlizzi 2019).
Key developments in the Italian external migration control policy regime

Between 2011 and 2018, two key features in the development of the Italian external migration control policy regime can be identified: the adoption of the ‘hotspot approach’ and the externalization of border controls (Terlizzi 2019).

The ‘hotspot approach’

The ‘hotspot approach’ was launched as part of the European Agenda on Migration in 2015 and aims to provide assistance to countries with high migratory pressure and to coordinate the activities of EU and national authorities at the external borders. ‘Hotspots’ are facilities for initial reception, identification, registration and fingerprinting of migrants arriving in the EU by sea. In implementing the European Agenda on Migration, the Ministry of the Interior has drafted a document titled the ‘Italian Roadmap’, which includes measures aimed at improving ‘the capacity, quality and efficiency of the Italian asylum system in the areas of first reception and repatriation’ (Government of Italy 2015: 2). The Ministry of the Interior has also issued a document containing the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) applicable to the Italian hotspots. As defined in the document, a hotspot is a designated area, usually (but not necessarily) in the proximity of a landing place where, as soon as possible and consistent with the Italian regulatory framework, new arrivals land safely and are subjected to medical screenings. [Migrants] are controlled, pre-identified, and, after having been informed about their current condition as irregular immigrants and the possibility to apply for international protection, they are fingerprinted (Government of Italy 2015: 4).

The document also lists the basic staffing required for each hotspot. These include medical staff, a Frontex team to provide support for pre-identification and screening activities, experts from the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) to provide information on the relocation programme, Frontex experts for the verification of documents, and, finally, forensic experts to take fingerprints. Crucially, besides the ‘Italian Roadmap’ and the SOPs, hotspots lack a solid legal basis. In fact, the activities taking place within hotspots are not regulated by any EU directive or regulation nor by any Italian legislation. Despite the absence of a clear legal framework regu-

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5 Currently, there are four hotspots on Italian territory (in Lampedusa, Messina, Pozzallo, and Taranto).
lating hotspots,⁶ the latter have become crucial within the Italian asylum system and the relocation procedure.

Non-governmental actors have reported several issues.⁷ For example, the Association for Legal Studies on Immigration (Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull’Immigrazione, ASGI) highlighted that hotspots have become part of ‘a standard procedure [according to which] migrants are detained without any court order, forced to be fingerprinted, and classified as asylum seekers or economic migrants depending on a summary assessment’ (AIDA 2017: 25; see also Extraordinary Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights 2017). On many occasions, nationality has been used as a filtering criterion to classify people as ‘economic migrants’ without analysing the case for asylum on its merits. Such migrants are notified with an expulsion order and detained in pre-removal facilities.⁸ Moreover, it has been reported that the hotspots’ occupancy levels have regularly exceeded the official capacity (Committee for the Prevention of Torture 2018). Although the identification rate in hotspots remains high, it has also been documented that Italian authorities have in some cases elected not to identify migrants on purpose to ‘avoid’ the Dublin procedure since they are aware that most people arriving in Italy are attempting to reach other countries.⁹

The externalization of border controls

A variety of actions can be categorized as ‘externalization measures’, including both direct (for example, interdiction at land borders and sea) and indirect actions (for example, supporting border management policies in third countries). Externalization can occur through either bilateral and multilateral states’ agreements or unilateral initiatives through which admission procedures and decisions become no longer confined to the actual physical border but involve the point of departure (or of transit) as well (Frelick, Kysel, and Podkul 2016; Menjívar 2014). In a nutshell, the term externalization refers to ‘a process that moves the migration control policies beyond the (European) external borders’ (Biondi 2012; see also Guild and Bigo 2005).

⁶ Vague reference to hotspots is provided only in Legislative Decree No. 13 of 17 February 2017, “Disposizioni urgenti per l’accelerazione dei procedimenti in materia di protezione internazionale, nonché per il contrasto dell’immigrazione illegale” (Oxfam 2016; Pannia et al. 2018).
⁷ Interview with an office manager (NGO), 7 November 2018.
⁸ Interview with a migration expert, 24 October 2018.
⁹ Interview with an office manager (NGO), 7 November 2018; interview with a migration expert, 24 October 2018.
Externalization has always been one of the most important features of the overall EU strategy of border management (Müller and Slominski 2021). As stated in a document issued by the Italian Recreational and Cultural Association (Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana, ARCI), ‘the actual goal of the EU, with the Italian government in the front line, is to try to draw up our borders in Africa, or even at the countries of departure themselves, blocking at source “economic” migrants and asylum seekers’ (ARCI 2016: 8). In November 2015, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) was set up by the European Commission, 25 EU member states, as well as Norway and Switzerland. The aim is to foster stability and contribute to better migration management, as well as ‘to address the root causes of destabilization, forced displacement and irregular migration by promoting economic and equal opportunities, security and development’ (European Commission 2018: 7). Clearly, the objective of the fund is to support countries of origin and transit to block the flow of migrants, as well as to advance development projects seeking to remove the causes of migration and establish an African borders control system to identify transiting migrants (ARCI 2016).

To curb migration flows, Italy has been relying upon cooperation with African countries since the 1990s, long before the EUTF was set up.10 Important bilateral agreements were signed with Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt within the time period under consideration (2011–2018). In 2011, Italy recognized Libya’s National Transitional Council (NTC) and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed. According to this agreement, ‘the Parties shall exchange information on flows of illegal immigration [and] on the criminal organizations that facilitate them, [as well as] provide mutual assistance and cooperation in the fight against illegal immigration, including the return of illegal immigrants’.11 Bilateral cooperation between the two countries has been consolidated through other agreements signed during 2012. As a result of these agreements, Italy committed to providing the necessary technical support to help Libyan authorities control Libya’s borders, seen as a meaningful contribution to the control of Italian (maritime) borders. In 2011, accords were signed with Egypt and Tunisia as well, with the latter setting ‘concrete measures to prevent irregular arrivals in Italy and to repatriate Tunisian nationals arriving in the country’ (Paoletti 2012).

In 2017, another MoU was signed between the Italian and Libyan governments. The agreement reactivated the Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation Treaty signed in 2008. As stated in the document, Italy commits to pro-

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10 Agreements were signed with North African Mediterranean countries, such as Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia (see, for example, Marchetti 2010). As for Italian–Libyan cooperation, see for example, Klepp (2010).

vide ‘support and funding for growth programmes in regions affected by illegal immigration, in various sectors, such as renewable energy, infrastructure, health, transport, human resource development, education, staff training and scientific research’. Moreover, Italy provides technical and technological support to the Libyan authorities in charge of the fight against irregular immigration, mainly represented by the Libyan navy and the coastguard. As with the 2008 Treaty, several concerns have been raised by human rights organizations, which pointed to the ‘arbitrary detention of migrants, abuse and torture at the hands of the Libyan authorities’ (Bajec 2018). As reported by Amnesty International (2018: 212), Italy has continued to implement measures to increase the Libyan coastguard’s capacity to intercept refugees and migrants and take them back to Libya. This was done amidst growing evidence of the Libyan coastguard’s violent and reckless conduct during interceptions of boats and of its involvement in human rights violations.

As argued by Paoletti (2012), bilateral relations between Italy and North African countries ‘demonstrates numerous elements of continuity pointing to the dominance of domestic interests over human rights considerations, [in that] border control is prioritized over a more comprehensive human rights policy framework’. In fact, since cooperation is established with countries where systematic violations of human rights are reported, the Italian externalization strategy certainly poses serious concerns in terms of respect of refugees and asylum seekers fundamental rights (see also Frelick, Kysel, and Podkul 2016; Steinhilper and Grujters 2018; Villa, Grujters, and Steinhilper 2018). Border externalization may indeed ‘attempt to (or effectively) limit formal legal obligations, including the right to seek and enjoy asylum, by preventing migrants from ever coming under the jurisdiction of destination states’ (Frelick, Kysel, and Podkul 2016: 197). In Italy, there have been cases of collective pushbacks preventing migrants from applying for asylum. In 2012, the practice was ruled unlawful by the European Court of Human Rights in the Hirsi Jamaa v. Italy judgement. Though Italian gov-

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12 Memorandum of Understanding, 2 February 2017. Available at http://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Libia.pdf. On similar grounds, in 2017 the Italian government has also renovated the cooperation over border management and security with Tunisia.

13 Interview with a migration expert, 03 December 2018; interview with an activist, 23 November 2018.

14 Interview with a legal expert, 18 October 2018.

15 The case concerned Somali and Eritrean nationals intercepted by Italian authorities on 6 May 2009. Pushbacks were part of the Italian government’s efforts to interrupt the flows of migrants by sea from Libya, and were conducted in agreement with Libyan authorities (for details, see Papanicolopulu 2013).
ernments have declared that no more pushbacks towards Libya will be carried out, Italy is still engaged in preventing migrants from reaching Italian shores, and cooperation with Libya for the purpose of migration control has continued.

Overall, what is striking is that, although decision-makers have constantly highlighted the need to fight ‘illegal’ immigration, ‘legal channels’ for asylum seekers to access Italian territory remain weak. These channels are mainly implemented through the ‘humanitarian corridors’ (corridoi umanitari) project. This innovative project was launched in 2015 with an MoU between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the Community of Sant’Egidio, the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (La Federazione delle chiese evangeliche in Italia) and the Waldensian Evangelical Church (Chiesa evangelica valdese). The legal basis of the project, which is not a government initiative and does not receive public financing, is Article 25 of the Regulation (EC) No 810/2009. Member States can issue humanitarian visas valid for their territory based on this regulation. The aim is to facilitate the safe and legal arrival in Italy of potential beneficiaries of international protection (especially the most vulnerable).

Policy narratives and the externalization strategy: Between humanitarianism and securitization

As a legal expert has commented, the Italian approach to border management in the last few years can be defined as ‘schizophrenic’. There have been periods in which access to the territory has been restricted harshly and periods of relative openness, above all vis-à-vis search and sea rescue operations. The same definition might apply to the discourses developed in the public debate. As the analysis shows, the narrative has swung between humanitarianism and securitization of border management, with a constant emphasis on solidarity and externalization (see Table 6.1).

Narratives of humanitarianism have focused on the commitment by the Italian government and EU institutions to save migrants’ lives and protect their

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16 Interview with a migration expert, 24 October 2018; interview with an office manager (NGO), 7 November 2018; interview with a decision-maker (law enforcement), 13 December 2018.

17 By early 2019, around 2000 people (mostly Syrians) have arrived in Italy through the ‘humanitarian corridors’ (Terlizzi 2019). For more information about the humanitarian corridors see Comunità di Sant’Egidio (2019) and https://www.santegidio.org/pageID/30112/langID/it/CORRIDOI-UMANITARI.html.

18 Interview with a legal expert, 18 October 2018.
human rights. However, the humanitarian discourse is inextricably intertwined with that of securitization. Indeed, humanitarianism and securitization have often gone hand in hand. Crucial to the analysis of the ‘humanitarian–security nexus’ is the discourse developed around Operation Mare Nostrum.\(^\text{19}\) Officially a humanitarian mission aimed at saving lives at sea, the Italian government launched the operation as a response to the Lampedusa shipwreck of 3 October 2013, when 368 migrants died after their boat sank before reaching Italian shores. However, the operation was also presented as a security mission to capture smugglers (Cuttitta 2014). As stated by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Emma Bonino (Italian Radicals),\(^\text{20}\) ‘Operation Mare Nostrum […] certainly has the merit of saving people […] but [it also represents] the possibility of filtering and controlling refugees who are ‘less refugees’ [than they are economic migrants]’\(^\text{21}\).

The securitarian–humanitarian mix has also characterized the discourse over the need to establish cooperation with and provide assistance to African countries, even before 2011. Italian decision-makers have always considered the externalization of border management and migration control as a winning strategy to curb migratory flows. In 2006, concerning deaths at sea, the then Minister of the Interior Giuliano Amato (Independent)\(^\text{22}\) declared that ‘[w]e need] to stop the flow of illegal immigration because it is a flow organized by […] criminal organizations that put migrants’ lives at risk, first in the desert and then in the crossing of the Mediterranean’.\(^\text{23}\) One year later, an agreement for the joint patrolling of the Libyan coast was presented as necessary to stop smugglers and, therefore, save human lives and disrupt criminal organizations. In 2009, when Italian authorities conducted several pushback operations, the then Minister of the Interior Roberto Maroni (Northern League)\(^\text{24}\) declared that ‘since the agreement with Libya came into force, [thousands of people] have not left Libya. This is the most positive fact, I believe, because the […] tragedy of so many deaths at sea has been avoided’.\(^\text{25}\) Pushbacks were even defined as ‘an act of great humanity’\(^\text{26}\) by

\(^\text{19}\) Mare Nostrum was a military operation launched on 14 October 2013 and enhanced by a resolution of the Council of Ministers approved on the same day. It started on 18 October 2013 and ended on 31 October 2014.
\(^\text{20}\) Government led by Enrico Letta (grand coalition, 2013–2014)
\(^\text{21}\) Parliamentary intervention, 12 December 2013.
\(^\text{22}\) Government led by Romano Prodi (centre-left, 2006–2008).
\(^\text{23}\) Parliamentary intervention, 3 August 2006.
\(^\text{24}\) Government led by Silvio Berlusconi (centre-right, 2008–2011).
\(^\text{25}\) Parliamentary intervention, 23 September 2009.
then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Similarly, in 2011, Maroni argued that cooperation with Tunisia in border surveillance at sea ‘is absolutely important […] because it serves to prevent landings, which is always the best thing to do since it makes it possible to save human lives’.27

The need to externalize border controls was also emphasized in official documents. According to a 2013 report by the Parliamentary Committee Responsible for Monitoring the Implementation of the Schengen Agreement, migration flows should be governed ‘with a view to solidarity in the management of external borders’, which makes it ‘urgent for the European Union to act as a counterpart to bilateral agreements with […] African countries’ (Chamber of Deputies and Senate of the Republic 2013: 20). In 2016, in a letter to the Presidents of the European Commission and the European Council, the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi (Democratic Party)28 stated that ‘the management of migratory flows is no longer sustainable without a targeted and enhanced cooperation with third countries, both of origin and transit’.29 The letter introduced a ‘non-paper’, which the Italian government labelled a ‘Migration Compact’. It stressed that all initiatives in the field of migration controls should focus ‘first and foremost on African countries of origin and transit’.30 In this respect, the EU and its member states could offer third countries incentives like investment projects, cooperation on security, legal migration opportunities, and resettlement schemes. For its part, the EU might request stronger commitments to effective border control and reduce flows towards Europe, cooperation on returns/readmissions, management of migration and refugee flows, and strengthening the fight against trafficking in human beings and the smuggling of migrants.

In 2017, the idea that cooperation with third countries was needed to prevent life-threatening crossings and save human lives was remarked in a letter to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights by the then Minister of the Interior Marco Minniti (Democratic Party).31 Minniti stated that supporting Libyan authorities in border control ‘contributes to reducing the risk

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27 Parliamentary intervention, 7 April 2011.
of accidents and shipwrecks, a risk that can only be eliminated by stopping departures'.

The narrative related to the need for solidarity and fair distribution of responsibilities (burden-sharing) between EU member states has also played a crucial role in developing Italy’s externalization strategy. As stated in 2011 by then Minister of the Interior Roberto Maroni,

a system that leaves the individual coastal states of the southern Mediterranean alone to manage unilaterally or bilaterally such important issues as illegal immigration cannot work [...]. Italy cannot be the only country that carries out [actions] in all Maghreb countries.

The Parliamentary Committee Responsible for Monitoring the Implementation of the Schengen Agreement in 2013 also stressed the need to identify at the European level concrete ways of supporting countries such as Italy, which are particularly exposed [...] to flows of refugees, [and] to ensure that the burden of flows is appropriately shared among the Member States of the European Union (Parliament of Italy 2013: 16, 19).

This discourse is undoubtedly linked to the pitfalls of the Dublin Regulation, which national decision-makers have highlighted on several occasions.

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter has aimed to investigate the Italian border management and external migration control regime and its developments from 2011 to 2018. In particular, it has explored the dominant policy narratives mobilized by key decision-makers in government to legitimize decisions in this policy domain.

Several key issues have been identified in presenting the main developments in the Italian external migration control policy regime. These are primarily related to 1) the ‘hotspot approach’ and 2) the externalization strategy. As far as the implementation of the ‘hotspot approach’ is concerned, the activities taking place in hotspots lack a clear and solid legal basis. In fact, hotspots are not regulated by any EU directive or regulation nor by primary Italian legislation, as they are provided for and disciplined by secondary legislation. Moreover, several criticisms have been reported by non-governmental ac-

34 Parliamentary intervention, 7 April 2011.
tors. Concerns have been related to the identification procedure, with migrants who have been often classified either as asylum seekers or economic migrants depending on an approximate and superficial assessment. Poor living conditions and severe violations of fundamental rights in hotspots and pre-removal facilities have also been detected. Moreover, although the identification rate in hotspots remains high, no positive results were achieved regarding the relocation policy.

Concerning the border externalization strategy, Italy has signed several agreements with African countries to curb migratory flows. However, the countries with which Italy has established cooperation have shown reports of systematic violations of migrants’ rights. In this respect, the Italian authorities appear to have entirely overlooked the humanitarian consequences of the restrictive control policies implemented in agreement with African countries. Moreover, by preventing migrants from ever coming under Italian jurisdiction, externalization might directly violate the right to seek and benefit from asylum.

This study has also traced the dominant policy narratives related to border management and external migration controls in Italy through a qualitative content analysis of text data. The chapter has defined policy narratives as a set of arguments that decision-makers construct and mobilize to influence policy choices and establish the assumptions for policy-making. In particular, a narrative is made of two components: 1) a set of arguments about the issue to be addressed and; 2) a set of arguments about how the identified policy measures will solve the issue. Italian decision-makers have constantly pointed to the excessive migratory pressure and ‘illegal immigration’ as the problems to solve. As for the solutions, it has been shown that policy narratives have mainly revolved around the need to save migrants’ lives and protect their human rights (humanitarianism), as well as to combat illegal immigration and smuggling of migrants (securitization).

Interestingly, these narratives have cut across partisan divides and have often gone hand in hand, showing the crucial role of the humanitarian–security nexus in the development and design of the Italian externalization strategy. In this regard, humanitarian rhetoric has been mobilized to legitimize the implementation of security policy measures (Cutitta 2018; Korkut, Terlizzi, and Gyollai 2020; Sciurba and Furri 2018). Moreover, evidence shows that decision-makers—in centre-left, centre-right, technocratic, and grand coalition governments alike—have emphasized the need for solidarity and fair

35 Since 1975, the General Assembly of the United Nations has recommended the use of the terms ‘undocumented’ or ‘irregular’ migrants. Nevertheless, expressions such as ‘illegal’ or ‘clandestine’ are frequently found in the material (even in official documents). These terms have to be considered inappropriate both from a formal and a substantial point of view (see Liguori 2019).
distribution of responsibilities between EU member states to tackle migration flows (burden-sharing).

Overall, in terms of policy implications, it is important to highlight that while the main issue at stake has always been ‘illegal’ immigration, on very few occasions have decision-makers pointed to the need to implement safe and legal channels for asylum seekers and refugees. Italy should reinforce the ‘legal channels’ for asylum seekers to access the Italian asylum system. Currently, such channels are in effect guaranteed by the ‘humanitarian corridors’ (corridoi umanitari). However, this is not an official government initiative. Strengthening legal access would facilitate safe arrival in Italy for the beneficiaries of international protection. Moreover, the Italian externalization strategy has been mainly focused on limiting cross-border flows of migrants. In striking a balance between maintaining secure borders and allowing the legitimate movement of individuals seeking asylum, Italy should better evaluate the humanitarian consequences of its securitarian border externalization policy.

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