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Analysis of media articles on the Sea Watch Case: Facts and controversial issues

SUB-REPORT

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CONTENT

1. Introduction

This case study analyses the media coverage of the rescue operation conducted by the NGO boat *Sea Watch 3* in June 2019 off the Libyan coast. In particular, the period of analysis spans from June 12th, 2019 – when 53 migrants were rescued in the Libyan Search and Rescue (hereafter SAR) zone – to the period soon after June 29th, 2019 – when the captain, Carola Rackete, decided to enter the port of Lampedusa, forcing the interdiction imposed by the then Italian Minister of Interior, Matteo Salvini.

This particular case study has been chosen mainly for three reasons: (1) Although the case took place off the Italian shores and involved mainly Italian institutions (the abovementioned Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, the Italian Coast Guard and the Guardia di Finanza [Italian Finance Police, hereafter GdF]), it soon intertwined with a myriad of European and international legal and political issues. On the one hand, this necessarily complicates the analysis and the positions of the parties involved. However, on the other, it can improve the comprehension of the general legal and political context surrounding the case. (2) Consequently, in relation to the media coverage the case study did not remain confined at national level, but acquired a broad European and international interest, making it quite valuable in terms of research analysis and data comparison. (3) In many European countries the issue of migration is highly politicised and often subject to manipulation from both political groups and the media. The analysis of this case study aims to debunk some of the misrepresentations and misleading opinions surrounding migration, by looking at the facts and at the legal framework under which the rescue operation took place.

2. Desk Research

2.1 Literature Overview

This sub-report employs Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA, see Wodak, 2002; Fairclough, 2013) as a methodological framework. CDA allows to take into consideration not only the text (broadly conceived in its combination of written texts, visual contents and data), but also the broad social, political and economic context in which the news is produced, thus providing a more complete and critical analysis of the news itself. In taking into consideration the surrounding context, CDA does not merely contemplate it, but it attempts to evaluate and explain it, in particular by looking at the multiple relations and dynamics between the context and the text. In the words of Fairclough (2013), CDA

> "is normative critique: it does not simply describe existing realities but also evaluates them, assesses the extent to which they match up to values that are taken (contentiously) to be fundamental for just or decent societies (e.g., certain requisites for human well-being). It is explanatory critique: it does not simply describe and evaluate existing realities but seeks to explain them, e.g., by showing them to be effects of structures or mechanisms or forces which the analyst postulates and whose reality s/he seeks to test out (e.g., inequalities in wealth, income and access to various social goods might be explained as an effect of mechanisms and forces associated with capitalism or particular varieties of capitalism)". (p. 178)

By the same token, CDA presupposes a relational, dialectical understanding between the text, the media, and the surrounding context, disclosing the intertwining power relations between political institutions, socio-economic forces and information agencies in the process of knowledge production. CDA considers media not as neutral and objective institutions, but as deeply embedded in the social and political reality that they want to portray. As Wodak put it (2002, p. 6), "Media institutions often purport to be neutral in that they provide space for public discourse, that they reflect states of affairs disinterestedly, and that they give the perceptions and arguments of the newsmakers", but these assumptions fall easily apart in light of a critical analysis of the multiplicity of ways through which language is used in mediating and conveying ideology across social institutions.

It therefore emerges that, far from being a neutral and objective aspect, the text is an interactive, lively part of the context, which reflects a myriad of relations with it and with the media. The text, just as the media instrument through which it is conveyed, becomes a medium of power, expressing and reflecting the ideological structure of society. According to Wodak (2002,

> "the constant unity of language and other social matters ensures that language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power. Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and long term. Language provides a finely articulated means for differences in power in social hierarchical structures". (p. 11)

Following this methodological approach, the remaining section of this paragraph will expound on three main aspects that are paramount to disassemble the different newspaper articles. First, a brief introduction on the main facts will be carried out, following the reconstruction of the series of events through official (institutional) and semi-official (social networks) declarations, and the exhaustive article by Bruno Saetta (2019). The following section will provide a brief overview over the main international dispositions on rescue operations at sea and on human rights more generally, in order to have a broader understanding of the legal framework under which the *Sea Watch 3* operation has taken place. The last section will expound the rescue operations at sea over the last 10 years, in order to portray the different actors involved, critically analyse their purpose of intervention, and explore the developments, changes, and dynamics of such practices in light of the international, European and national legal frameworks. The analysis of the articles that will follow should therefore always keep in mind these sections, as they lay the groundwork for a more thorough understanding of the events and of the way they have been portrayed by the media.

2.2 The facts

On June 12th, 2019, following a warning launched by the aircraft of the NGO *Colibri*, the crew of the rescue boat *Sea Watch 3* announces the rescue of 53 migrants (among whom nine women, two toddlers and three unaccompanied minors) from a rubber boat in distress off the coasts of Zawiya, Libya (illustration 1). As the shipwreck occurred in the Libyan SAR zone, the Libyan Coast Guard initially declares their intention to take over the rescue operation and to return migrants to the Libyan shores. However, soon after they arrive in the area in the middle

of the rescue operation, the Libyan Coast Guard leaves, without giving any indications or support to the *Sea Watch 3* crew (illustration 2).

Illustration 1: The *Sea Watch International* tweet reporting the rescue. [Screenshot *Twitter*]

Illustration 2: The *Sea Watch Italy* tweet on the intervention of Libyan authorities. [Screenshot *Twitter*]

After the rescue operation, the *Sea Watch 3* crew gets in contact with the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) of Italy, the Netherlands (the ship's flag state), Malta and Libya, in order to inform them about the rescue and ask them to provide a Place of Safety (hereafter POS) for the disembarkation of migrants. The Libyan MRCC replies, indicating Tripoli as POS (illustration 3), while the Italian counterpart, claiming not to be responsible, does not provide any POS. The Italian Minister of Interior replies via *Twitter* suggesting the rescue boat to follow the indications of the Libyan authorities, or to "account for their own actions" in case of disobedience (illustration 4).

Illustration 3: The document from the Libyan MRCC providing a POS. [Screenshot retrieved via *Sea Watch 3 Twitter*]


Illustration 4: Tweet of the then Italian Minister of the Interior. [Screenshot *Twitter*]

In their reply, the *Sea Watch 3* states, however, that they cannot return migrants to Libya as the country does not comply with the international conventions for the rights of migrants and refugees, and therefore cannot be considered a POS (illustration 5). Since they have not been provided with a proper POS, the *Sea Watch 3* announces its heading towards the closest POS, that is Lampedusa, specifying that they will stop outside the Italian territorial limits in wait for further indications (illustration 6).

Illustration 5: The reply of *Sea Watch 3* to the Libyan authorities. [Screenshot retrieved via *Sea Watch 3 Twitter*]
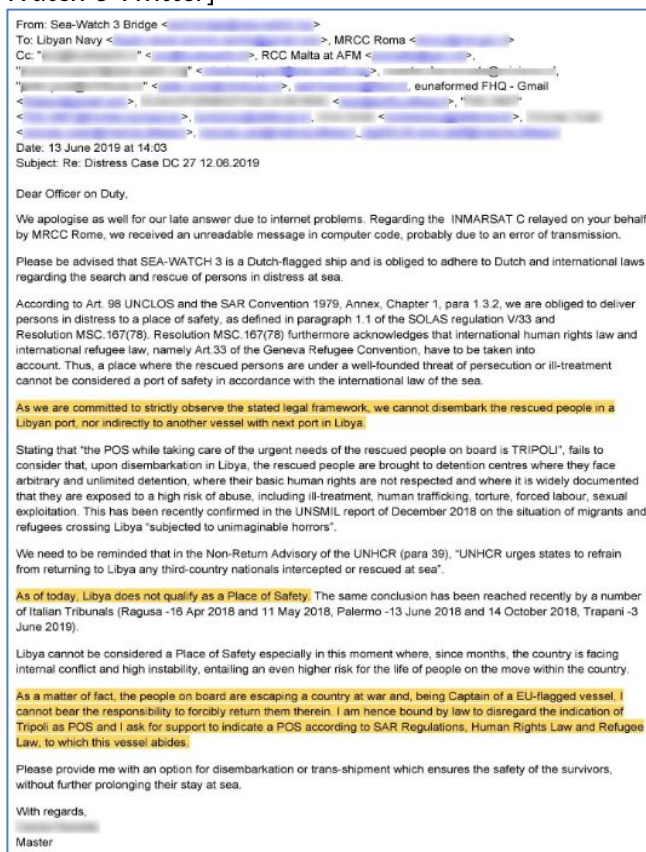
Illustration 6: The *Sea Watch 3* decides to head towards the closest POS: Lampedusa. [Screenshot *Twitter*]

Once arrived 16 miles off the coast of the island, on June 14th, the Italian MRCC, following communication with the boat crew, agrees to send personnel to check the medical conditions of the migrants on board (illustration 7). Following medical examinations, ten of the 53 migrants are granted permission to disembark, but six women and three unaccompanied minors remain on board (illustration 8). The night after, the GdF enters the ship to notify the captain of the newly approved Decree Law n. 53/2019 (so-called "Second Safety Decree", strongly demanded by then Italian Minister of Interior, Mr. Salvini), which further restricts the possibilities for NGO rescue boats to access territorial waters, increasing the fines they can incur in case of noncompliance (illustration 9).

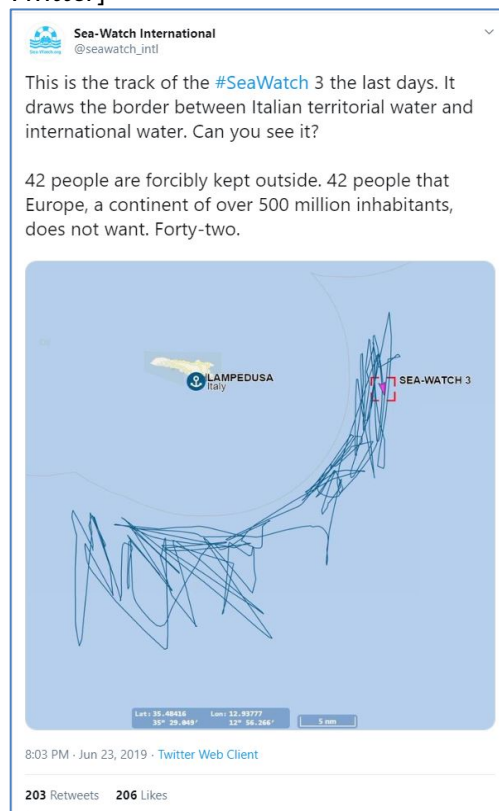**Illustration 7:** The *Sea Watch 3* tweet announcing medical controls on board. [Screenshot *Twitter*]

Sea-Watch International
@seawatch_intl

On the #SeaWatch3, we are now already waiting for 3 days for a port of safety, while the next one is only a few miles away. Now, the MRCC Rome announced a health control on board. We can help you out: All of them need protection. All of them need solid ground under their feet.

12:34 PM · Jun 15, 2019 · TweetDeck

77 Retweets   134 Likes

Illustration 8: The *Sea Watch 3* tweet announcing the disembarkation of 10 people on medical grounds. [Screenshot *Twitter*]

Sea-Watch International
@seawatch_intl

10 of the people rescued by #SeaWatch3 have just been disembarked by Italian authorities on medical grounds. 43 are still on board, including 3 unaccompanied minors, the youngest 12 years old. 43 people with inalienable rights, with the right to a place of safety. We need a port!

7:24 PM · Jun 15, 2019 · Twitter Web Client

62 Retweets   102 Likes

Illustration 9: The *Sea Watch 3* tweet attesting the presence of the GdF. [Screenshot *Twitter*]

Sea-Watch International
@seawatch_intl

Love letters from Rome: The IT Ministry of Interior sent a Guardia di Finanza boat to #SeaWatch3 last night to make 100% sure our captain and head of mission are informed about minister #Salvini's new decree, which threatens to fine us €50.000 for bringing rescuees to safety.

Jonas Schreijäg

3:40 PM · Jun 16, 2019 · Twitter Web Client

91 Retweets   134 Likes

Illustration 10: The route of the *Sea Watch 3* waiting for obtaining a POS. [Screenshot *Twitter*]

Sea-Watch International
@seawatch_intl

This is the track of the #SeaWatch 3 the last days. It draws the border between Italian territorial water and international water. Can you see it?

42 people are forcibly kept outside. 42 people that Europe, a continent of over 500 million inhabitants, does not want. Forty-two.

LAMPEDUSA
Italy

SEA-WATCH 3

Lat: 35.40416   Lon: 12.93777
35° 29.049'   12° 56.266'   5 nm

8:03 PM · Jun 23, 2019 · Twitter Web Client

203 Retweets   206 Likes

In the following days, despite the continuous requests from the captain, the Italian authorities keep denying the *Sea Watch 3* a POS, forcing the boat to navigate around the European borders (illustration 10), while the medical situation on board worsens (illustration 11). On June 26th, two weeks after the initial rescue operations, the captain decides to enter the Italian territorial waters in order to take "the migrants to safety" (illustration 12).

Illustration 11: Another *Sea Watch 3* tweet showing the deteriorations of the medical conditions on board. [Screenshot *Twitter*]

Illustration 12: The tweet announcing the decision to enter the Italian territorial waters.
[Screenshot *Twitter*]

When the boat stops in front of the port of Lampedusa, the GdF and the Italian Coast Guard enter the boat to perform checks on people and on documentation (illustration 13), inviting the captain to wait for further directives from the Italian authorities (Saetta, 2019). After having declared a state of necessity – which remains unheard – and due to the aggravating medical conditions among migrants, on the night between June 28th and June 29th the captain decides to enter the port of Lampedusa (illustration 14). Despite the presence of a patrol boat of the GdF to prevent the *Sea Watch 3* from docking[1], the rescue boat slowly approaches the berth and eventually docks. After disembarking all the migrants, the captain Carola Rackete is taken away by the GdF and put under house arrest, in virtue of a series of charges – related to violence against public authorities – pressed against her by the Public Prosecutor of Agrigento. On July 2nd, 2019, the Investigation Magistrate (*Giudice per le Indagini Preliminari* in Italian, consequently GIP) orders the release of the *Sea Watch 3* captain, on the basis that her behaviour was dictated by the necessity to comply with international norms that had been incorporated in the Italian juridical system. In January 2020, the Italian Supreme Court of Cassation confirmed the decision, concluding that Carola Rackete should have never been arrested (Ziniti, 2020).

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[1] see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrsvVSiDCq8

Illustration 13: The message announcing the entrance of the GdF and of the Italian Coast Guard. [Screenshot *Twitter*]

Illustration 14: The Sea Watch 3 announcement to enter the port of Lampedusa.
[Screenshot *Twitter*]
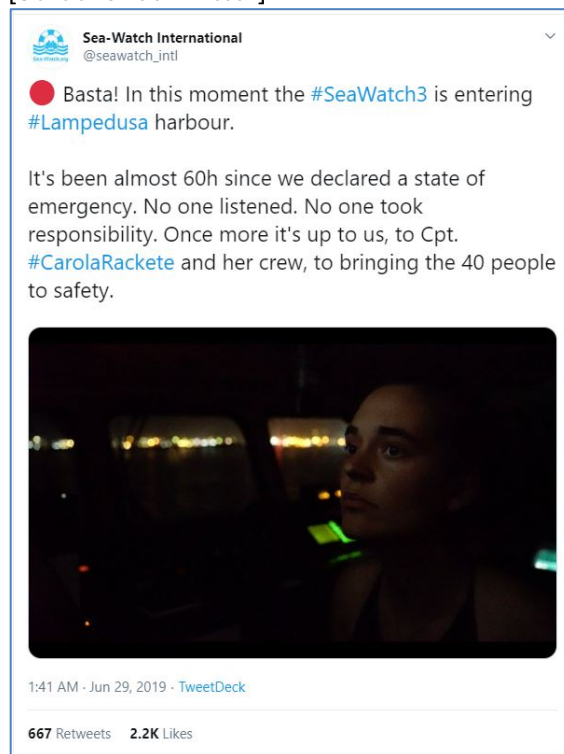
2.3 The legal framework

Reconstructing the legal framework under which rescue operations take place represents an arduous task, as several international and European policies intertwine and superimpose national legislation. However, the abovementioned GIP ordinance (n. 2592/19) and the article by Bruno Saetta (2019) help orientate among the maze of international and national laws on rescue at sea.

The starting point is the Italian Constitution and, in particular, its article 10, according to which "the Italian juridical system conforms to the norms of international law". The latter, therefore, assumes greater juridical relevance, imposing the former to adopt or adapt to them. Among the norms of international law that the GIP ordinance mentions are:

- The 1982 United Nations Convention of the law of the Sea (better known as Montego Bay Convention, or UNCLOS), which orders the master of a ship

  "a) to render assistance to any person found at sea in danger of being lost, b) to proceed with all possible speed to the rescue of persons in distress, if informed of their need of assistance, in so far as such action may reasonably be expected of him; c) after a collision, to render assistance to the other ship, its crew and its passengers and, where possible, to inform the other ship of the name of his own ship, its port of registry and the nearest port at which it will call." (art. 98)

- The 1974 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (so-called SOLAS Convention and its successive modifications), which likewise tells that

"The master of a ship at sea which is in a position to be able to provide assistance, on receiving a signal from any source that persons are in distress at sea, is bound to proceed with all speed to their assistance, if possible informing them or the search and rescue service that the ship is doing so." (Chap. 5, Regulation 33.1)

- The 1979 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (or SAR Convention), which establishes, among other provisions, that

"Parties (i.e. states) shall ensure that assistance be provided to any person in distress at sea (…) regardless of the nationality or status of such a person or the circumstances in which that person is found" (art. 2.1.10), and "should authorize, subject to applicable national laws, rules and regulations, immediate entry into or over its territorial sea or territory of rescue units of other Parties solely for the purpose of searching for the position of maritime casualties and rescuing the survivors of such casualties" (art. 3.1.8). The same Convention also established that "The Party responsible for the search and rescue region in which such assistance is rendered shall exercise primary responsibility for ensuring such coordination and cooperation occurs, so that survivors assisted are disembarked from the assisting ship and delivered to a place of safety" (art. 3.1.9).

- The 1942 Italian Navigation Law, which punishes the ship's master who fails to assist a person in danger with reclusion of up to two years (art. 1158).

Besides the international dispositions on rescue operations at sea, the international human rights provisions are also worth mentioning, being still binding in terms of legal force among the European Union and its single member states. The 1951 Refugee Convention is, in this respect, the most important document, as it lays out the main dispositions on the mutual responsibilities and relations between states and (potential) refugees. The Convention, enriched by the 1967 protocols, is legally binding for signatory states, although there is no institution that actually monitors their compliance. The article 33 on non-refoulement is of particular importance here: "No Contracting State shall expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion".

In other words, states should not expel or return refugees in countries where their lives can be at risk or where they might face persecution. This means, first of all, that Libya cannot be considered a suitable POS: Not only is the country affected by an almost decade-long civil war, but it is also one of the 50 countries that has not even signed the Refugee Convention or its protocols, thus lacking an internationally recognised system for the reception and integration of refugees. Sending migrants (and potential refugees) to the Libyan Coast Guard – as some suggest – would therefore be a blatant violation of humanitarian law. The case of Tunisia is similar: The country signed the Convention and the associated protocols. However, as many international organisations have denounced, it does not have a proper reception system and the rights of migrants in vulnerable situations are constantly being violated (Euromed Rights, 2019). For this reason, NGOs that operate at sea do not consider Tunisia as a POS, preferring instead to bring migrants towards Lampedusa or, whenever possible, Malta.

2.4 The rescue operations

In order to fully understand NGO operations in the central Mediterranean Sea, it is also necessary to look beyond policies and briefly examine the concrete practices of interventions carried out by the European Union, the single member states, and the NGOs themselves. However, it is also important to extricate ourselves in the maze of overlapping actors, purposes of operations and areas of intervention that have characterised the different missions. While the SAR zones have been clearly defined through international conventions (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2013, p. 33), the number of actors and the scope and areas of their interventions have varied greatly over the past couple of decades, as a result of a series of geopolitical, legal and humanitarian reasons at national, regional and European scale. Tracing back all such developments not only is an arduous task, but also exceeds the scope of this report. Some highlights of these developments and main changes are nonetheless necessary to understand and analyse the current situation.

After the burst of the so-called "Arab Spring" and the following intensification of migrant arrivals – which de facto brought the bilateral agreements between Italy and Libya for the deportation of migrants to an end – the Italian government asked the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders (Frontex) to accelerate the starting of the Joint Operation (JO) *Hermes*, otherwise foreseen in June, to February 20th, 2011. Launched in 2004, Frontex has been operating in the Mediterranean Sea since 2006 with the aim of assisting member states with, inter alia, the monitoring of migratory flows, the management of their external borders, the fight against organised cross-border crime and terrorism, and the coordination and organisation of joint operations (see Frontex, n.d.).

The JO *Hermes*, which had formally begun in 2009 and was progressively reinforced throughout the years, spanned across the Italian and Maltese SAR zones, with the aim of strengthening border surveillance activities, increasing the information gathering, combating cross-border crime (including the smuggling of migrants), and facilitating the early detection, identification and deportation of migrants. With the active participation of seven European countries coordinated by the Italian authorities, the JO *Hermes* contributed to a significant reduction in the number of migrant arrivals (illustration 15), but with a parallel increase in the number of incidents and deaths (illustration 16).

Illustration 15: Arrivals by month to Italy, 2015-2020. [Source: *IOM Missing Migrants Project*, https://missingmigrants.iom.int]
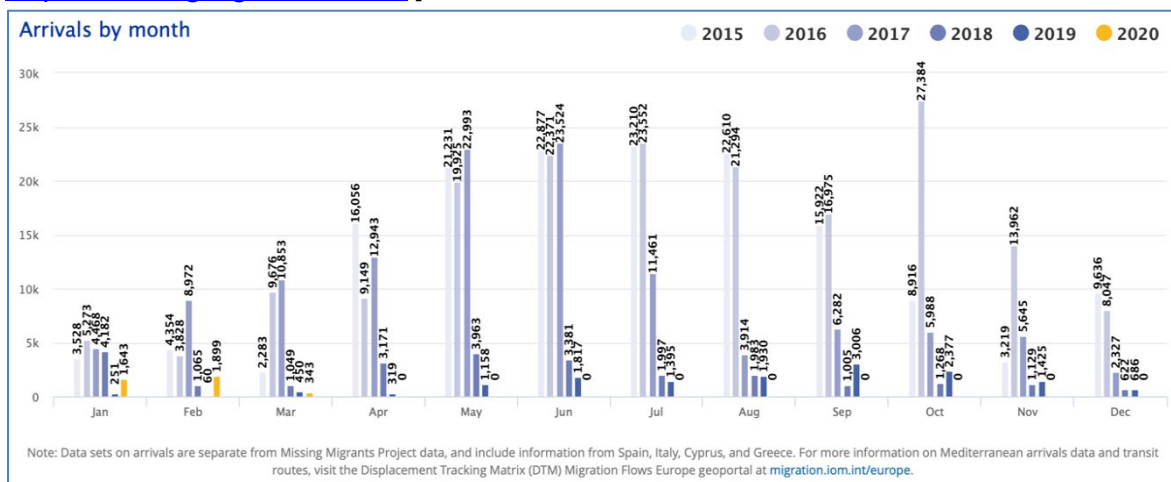
Illustration 16: Fatalities by month, 2014-2020. [Source: *IOM Missing Migrants Project*, https://missingmigrants.iom.int]
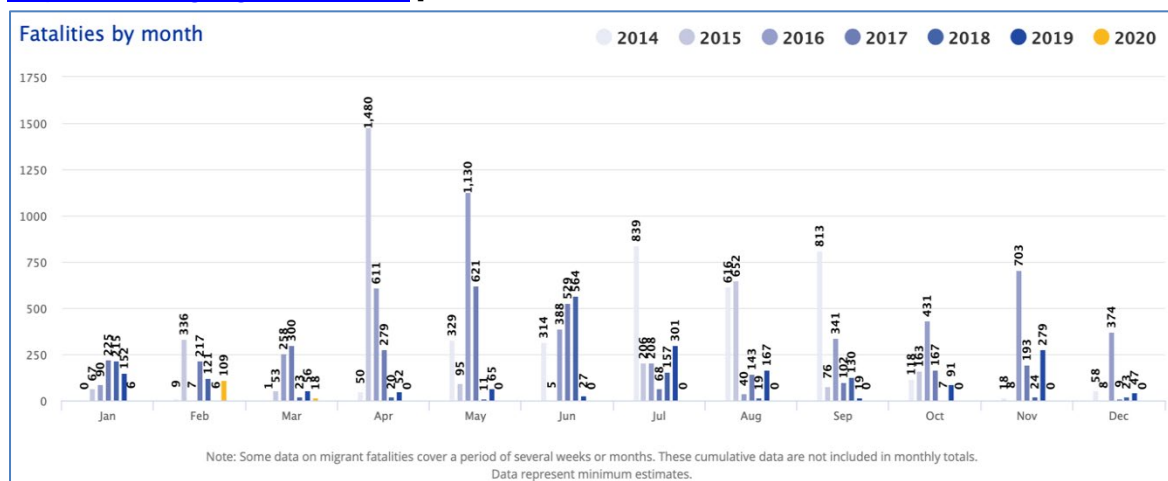
After the migrant shipwreck off the coasts of Lampedusa on October 3rd, 2013, which resulted in more than 360 deaths, the Italian government decided to launch the operation *Mare Nostrum* for the active search and rescue of migrant boats in distress. The operation *Mare Nostrum* extended therefore both the purposes of the mission and the area of intervention, stretching across the border with the Libyan SAR zone. The extension of the operation – which led to a reduction of the aims of intervention of the JO *Hermes* during its last year of operation – contributed to a noticeable increase in the number of migrant arrivals. However, given its high expenses of (€ 9 million per month, sustained by the Italian government), the operation was terminated after one year (October 2014), superseded by the Frontex JO *Triton*.

Compared with *Mare Nostrum*, the new Frontex JO reduced the area of intervention, the scope of the mission, and the financial budget. The operational area of *Triton* – supported by 26 European countries – covers the territorial waters of Italy as well as parts of the Italian and Maltese SAR zones. According to its website, the primary focus of the JO *Triton* is border control and surveillance, although "search and rescue remains a priority" (Frontex, 2016). The purpose of its mission, however, extended also to prevention of cross border crime (including smuggling), detections of drug smuggling, illegal fishing and maritime pollution. Despite the reduction of the operational areas and the increase in participating countries, its operational budget was limited to € 2.9 million per month (European Commission, 2014).

Since the beginning of the JO, the number of migrant deaths increased dramatically, culminating in the two shipwrecks off the Libyan coasts in April 2015, which resulted in about 1200 deaths. Following the shipwrecks, the operational budget and area of intervention of *Triton* were expanded (Frontex, 2015), although the main mission still was to control the external borders of the European Union. Besides, the *Triton* was flanked by the military EUNAVFOR MED operation (also known as operation *Sophia*), which expanded its area of intervention towards Libyan territorial waters,[2] with the aim of undertaking "systematic efforts to identify, capture and dispose of vessels and enabling assets used or suspected of being used by migrant smugglers or traffickers" (EUNAVFORMED Operation SOPHIA, n.d.). In other words, despite its wide area of intervention, the mission of operation *Sophia* is neither to

[2] see https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldeucom/144/14407.htm and this video for a comparison of the areas of intervention of the different joint operations: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=39&v=ts_NC6QiCsE&feature=emb_logo

perform SAR operations nor to simply identify boats in distress at sea. Rather, its mission is to combat human trafficking and smuggling by putting boats out of operation and thus hindering migrant journeys: in this way, the operation *Sophia* can "prevent further loss of life at sea" (ibid; see also Pezzani and Heller, 2016).

Since 2014, the reduction in areas of intervention and in the number of SAR operations at sea, combined with the parallel, staggering increase in migrant deaths, have prompted ten international NGOs (*MOAS, Sea Watch, Sos Méditerranée, Sea Eye, Medici Senza Frontiere, Proactiva Open Arms, Life Boat, Jugend Rettet, Boat Refugee* and *Save the Children*) to start their operations in the Mediterranean (Mussi, 2017), with the aim of identifying boats in distress, rescue their occupiers, and disembark them to the closest POS. As Cusumano (2020, p. 109) notices, "despite the limited capabilities of most char-ities, NGOs became the largest provider of maritime rescue, assisting over 115,000 migrants" between 2014 and 2017. Despite inserting themselves in an operational void left by European and national institutions, the NGOs' operations are often considered as a "pull factor" (wrongly; see Cusumano and Villa, 2019) and even accused of collusion with smugglers (again disproved; see Cusumano and Pattinson, 2018), attracting numerous critiques from certain parts of the population and the political spectrum.

Leaving aside these critiques for a moment (although still acknowledging their importance in shaping public opinion), it is important to focus on the legal aspects and operational repercussions. As Mussi (2017) shows, although de facto performing the same patrolling and rescuing operations that state boats with humanitarian purposes usually perform, NGO boats remain private boats, thus bound to the jurisdiction of the respective flag state. Their peculiar operations and purposes appear even more problematic if we consider, as mentioned earlier, the multiplicity of international regulations and national areas of intervention intersecting at sea. Given their blurred legal status between the public and private sphere, the Italian government, in cooperation with European institutions (although at the same time prompted by lack of European solidarity in shouldering the reception of migrants; see Cusumano and Gombeer, 2020), has attempted to intervene in the issue.

In July 2017, during an informal meeting of the European Ministers of Justice and Interior, the Italian authorities presented a Code of Conduct for the NGOs operating at sea, which established rules and practices for SAR operations conducted by NGO ships. The Code, which had entered into force in May 2017, envisaged specific (and sometimes controversial) rules for the execution of SAR operations, such as the obligation for the NGO to allow Italian police officers on board, when requested by Italian authorities, in order to collect data and information on migrant trafficking and smuggling[3], and the obligation for the NGO not to transfer rescued people to other boats (which, as some NGOs highlighted, might reduce their efficiencies and capabilities to save lives at sea)[4]. Following its approval, the Italian Minister of Interior announced that failure to comply with the Code would result in serious consequences for the NGOs, including the refusal to disembark migrants in Italian ports (Cusumano, 2019). Despite the threats, which were never implemented under the Democratic Party-led

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[3] Let us not forget that NGO boats often wave the flag of other states, so they are subject to other states' jurisdictions. The presence of Italian officers on board can be de facto considered an intromission in other states' affairs.

[4] For an interesting reconstruction (in Italian), see: https://formiche.net/2017/08/codice-minniti-ong/

government, four out of nine NGOs decided not to sign the Code (while one NGO was under legal investigations).

With the 2018 government change (a coalition between the political parties *5 Star Movement* and *Lega*), the threats became reality. The new government (with the leader of the far-right party *Lega*, Matteo Salvini, as Minister of Interior) announced the closure of ports for NGO boats, preventing them from disembarking migrants in the Italian territory until an agreement on their redistribution at European level had been found. However, this measure, despite having strong political and media results, did not actually prevent autonomous or state boats from disembarking migrants in Italian ports, as some articles will show. Besides, it introduced stricter rules regarding SAR operations at sea (in particular through the second Security Decree - no. 53/2019 - which entered into force in the middle of the *Sea Watch 3* standoff), which envisaged increased fines, arrest, and boat seizure for ship captains that violate the prohibition to enter or transit into Italian territorial waters.

It is within this framework of increasing border surveillance, prevention of migration movements and criminalisation of SAR operations that the events related to the *Sea Watch 3* should be analysed. While the following analysis focuses on newspaper articles and their point of view in reporting the facts, it is essential, therefore, to take into consideration the overarching political, legal and social framework in which the SAR operation conducted by the *Sea Watch 3* has taken place. With this in mind, the sub-report attempts to answer one main research question: how has the media portrayed the *Sea Watch 3* case?

3. General information about the sample

For this sub-report, a total of 30 online newspaper articles have been screened. 20 articles (67 %) are in Italian language from Italian newspapers; five (16,5 %) are in German language from Austrian newspapers; the remaining five (16,5 %) are in English language, from different countries, i.e. United Kingdom (*The Guardian*), Germany (*Deutsche Welle*), Malta (*Times of Malta*), Qatar and the Arab world more generally (*Al Jazeera*), US (*The Washington Post*).

The 20 articles in Italian come from 14 different sources: Seven of them (23 %) are also nationwide newspapers (*Corriere della Sera*, *Il Giornale*, *Il Secolo XIX*, *Avvenire*, *Il Messaggero*, *La Repubblica*, *La Stampa*), three (10 %) are local – Sicilian – newspapers (*La Sicilia*, *Il Giornale di Sicilia*, *Monreale Press*), two (7 %) are website versions of TV broadcasters (*Euronews* and *Rainews*), one (3 %) is the national press agency (*ANSA*), one (3 %) is online only (*Open*). The five articles in German language come from different Austrian newspapers (*Der Standard*, *Die Presse*, *Kronen Zeitung*, *Kleine Zeitung* and *Kurier*). Among the articles in English, three (10 %) are also newspapers (*The Washington Post*, *The Guardian* and the *Times of Malta*), while the other two (7 %) are either TV broadcasters (*Al Jazeera*) or websites (*Deutsche Welle*).

The time span of the articles varies from the initial rescue operation (June 12th, 2019) to the final disembarkation of migrants and the arrest of the captain (June 30th, 2019). Among the articles in Italian, only one (3 %) article (from *Corriere della Sera*) deals with initial rescue operations (it is reasonable to suppose that at the beginning the media coverage of the event was not so broad); nine (30 %) articles report on the first attempt by *Sea Watch 3* to force the maritime block (June 26th, 2019); the remaining ten (33 %) articles cover the *Sea Watch 3* decision to enter the port and disembark the migrants instead. Among the articles from

Austrian newspapers, one (3 %) refers to the initial attempt to enter the port, while the other four (13 %) deal with the final disembarkation and arrest of the captain. Similarly, among the articles in English language, two (7 %) of them report on first attempts to force the block, while the remaining three (10 %) articles deal with the entrance into the port and the disembarkation of migrants.

Regarding the type of articles, all of them are reports, that is they cover the main facts in relation to the event and quote the main declarations from relevant authorities, without analysing these facts and declarations in depth. Besides reporting on the main events, four (13 %) articles also express personal opinions in a more open way, leaning more prominently towards a specific point of view. The reason behind the choice of analysing reports is twofold: 1) although it might be easier to trace and support/confute the main argument in commentaries and opinion papers, in reports the process is more difficult, but nonetheless possible through the careful analysis of stylistic choices, language, sources and visual data; 2) although covering the main facts and declarations in an often clear and structured manner, reports are not immune to misrepresentations or to missing out certain important aspects, such as the reference to international laws. In other words, as these articles zoom in on the main facts, reporting on the chronicle of events and the main political declarations alongside them, they tend to overlook the bigger picture, that is the international, European and Italian legal framework under which these events take place.

Given the nature of the articles, most of them are either not signed (16 – 53 %) or signed as "editorial staff" (four – 13 %). This does not necessarily mean that these articles are an expression of the whole editorial board or aim at raising a public debate on a particular argument, but simply that they are a collection of reports from news agencies that someone has put together following the editorial line of the newspaper. In this respect, they often do not contain a strong point of view; rather, they tend to report the main facts and declarations on the event, leaning towards the particular point of view of the respective newspaper. However, this does not prevent us from carrying out a more thorough analysis – which will be expounded in the paragraphs below – of their stylistic and linguistic choices, as well as the sources that they mention. Despite the reports' seemingly neutral tone, such an analysis can give insights into the (editorial) point of view. Among the signed articles, six out of ten still report the main facts, although they tend to lean towards a particular point of view. The remaining four articles, instead, present the main facts and declarations with a stronger, personal point of view on the events.

Despite their apparently neutral nature, it is therefore possible to grasp and analyse misrepresentations in light of the main facts and legal framework outlined above. Whereas the details of the analysis will be expounded further below, it is useful to briefly elaborate on the main misrepresentations, shortcomings and faults encountered in the different articles, in order to provide an initial overview on the issue. One of the articles from *Il Giornale* (June 20th, 2019) sarcastically blames the NGO for having ignored Tunisia as the closest POS, failing to say that Tunisia cannot actually be considered a POS, given the lack of a proper system of international protection of refugees. In a similar way, the article from *La Sicilia* (June 28th, 2019) concludes with a quote from the Italian Minister of Interior Salvini stating that "the boat was closer to other countries: if you want to save lives, you go to the closest port; if you want to argue with the Italian government instead, then you act in a different way". However, no counterargument is offered within the article. The article from *Kronen Zeitung* (June 29th, 2019) opens with a

relatively strong title ("Sea-Watch 3 legte illegal an: Kapitänin verhaftet", which can be translated as "Sea-Watch 3 docked illegally: Captain arrested") and a rather venomous introductory paragraph, highlighting the legal violations committed by captain Rackete and the potential charges she and the NGO can face. Yet, the supposedly illegal actions that Rackete committed are not supported by any reference to the international legal framework.

As already mentioned, the international legal framework or the European migration and asylum policies are barely mentioned in the articles examined, thus missing an important aspect of the whole sequence of events. In 12 cases (40 %), representatives of European institutions (ten) or international organisations (two) are quoted, especially with regards to a potential solution to the events. In relation to the definition of the authorities potentially responsible for hosting the boat and receiving migrants, the debate between the Italian and Dutch governments is reported in seven cases, while quotes or comments from other European countries' members of government are included in six cases. However, even these cases are mentioned without any references to the international or European legal framework.

When the law is taken into consideration, it is usually with reference to the decree that the Italian government approved in the middle of the *Sea Watch 3* case and to the potential charges that Rackete or the NGO itself might face as a consequence of their actions (17 cases or 57 %). In these cases, the articles examined often expound the juridical procedures that the captain might face and the sanctions that the NGO might undergo with an abundance of details, with reported quotes from public prosecutors and other judicial authorities. Once again, references to international laws are, however, missing from the scene. Interestingly, three out of five articles from Austrian newspapers mention a potential violation of maritime law from the captain of the NGO boat (one of which specifying the "Italian" maritime law), but no further explanation on the various international conventions is provided.

Although the point of view of the articles might appear neutral in most cases, a more careful analysis of stylistic choices, linguistic uses, and sources included might expose particular leanings towards one side or the other. While the details on stylistic and linguistic choices are analysed in greater detail further below, it is important to linger over the quotations and the sources used in the articles. Almost all articles, for example, refer to the declarations of the Italian Minister of Interior or other members of the Italian government as well as those of NGO spokespersons or representatives but, given the absence of references to the international legal framework, it often appears that the events are presented as a political battle between the two contenders rather than a higher humanitarian issue where lives are at stake. In two (7 %) articles (*Open*, June 29th, 2019; *Monreale Press*, June 29th, 2019), GdF sources are explicitly quoted in relation to the collision between their boat and the NGO boat, including strong declarations that not only remain unverified by the authors, but are also confuted by the same images or videos that accompany the articles (see below). The latter explicitly talks of a "ramming" (in Italian "speronamento") both in the title and in the text, but the evidence is not provided (*Monreale Press*, June 29th, 2019). By the same token, five other articles (16,5 %) seem to exaggerate the main facts regarding the collision, putting the blame on the NGO boat.

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4. Language of the selected articles

Given the nature of the articles, the language used appears often neutral, tending to report on main facts and declarations. However, a more attentive analysis can reveal substantial stylistic differences among the various articles, which, in turn, can disclose different points of view and facilitate the examination of the texts.

The stylistic choices that the different articles employ – that is the way the main facts and declarations are reported – are emblematic of the potential point of view of the articles. In some cases (*Corriere della Sera*, June 27th, 2019; *Euronews*, June 27th, 2019; *Avvenire*, June 29th, 2019), declarations from members of government are enclosed between or end with a declaration from NGO members or spokespersons, confuting or undermining the previous comments. In others (*Il Messaggero*, June 27th, 2019; *La Stampa*, June 29th, 2019; *Kronen Zeitung*, June 29th, 2019), conversely, the reports on the NGO or on the European discussions on migrants' redistribution conclude with quotations by the Italian Minister of Interior, as a way to finish the debate towards his side. In the case of the *Times of Malta* (June 27th, 2019), the article starts with the Tweet from the NGO announcing its decision to force the block and enter the port, and concludes with a declaration from the *Proactiva Open Arms* spokeswoman, closing the whole article within NGO comments as a way to support their operations.

The analysis of the introductions and conclusions constitute therefore the next step, as they might disclose a particular point of view within the articles. The introduction can indeed set the tone for the discussion in the rest of the article, presenting the whole series of events from a certain point of view. The decision to start the article with the report of the apology from Rackete to the GdF for having "challenged the entry ban of the Italian authorities" (*Corriere della Sera*, June 29th, 2019), for example, seems to highlight the responsibility of the NGO and its captain for the whole situation from the beginning. Similarly, the articles from *Kronen Zeitung* (June 29th, 2019) and *Kleine Zeitung* (June 29th, 2019), which open with the potential charges that Rackete might face following her arrest, seem to underline that she has committed a series of serious violations for which she and the NGO must pay the price. On the other hand, one of the articles from the newspaper *Avvenire* (June 29th, 2019) chooses to begin with the "critiques from the French and German governments towards the management of the situation by the Italian government", explicitly suggesting where the article will drive at.

The conclusion, instead, can either reinforce the point of view of the article or introduce new aspects for further reflection. The article from *Washington Post*, for example, concludes with a list of all rescue operations of previous years at sea that ended up with a standoff, announced by the incipit "Without a comprehensive plan for what to do about migrants rescued in the Mediterranean, European countries continue to fight about what to do in each case" (*Washington Post*, June 26th, 2019). In this way, the conclusion strengthens the point of view of the author, which criticised European migratory policies and the political divisions between member states throughout the article. *La Repubblica* (June 27th, 2019) and *La Stampa* (June 29th, 2019), instead, terminate their articles with a brief report on the unregistered landings that had taken place during the *Sea Watch 3* standoff. However, while the former seems to highlight the inefficacy of "the enormous deployment of forces planned by the Minister of Interior Salvini", the latter focuses on the "paradox of the situation" where unregistered landings proceed while NGO boats are blocked outside the port of Lampedusa.

In several cases, articles contain particular figures of speech that enrich the details of the events and, in some cases, exaggerate their outcome. Expressions that evoke battles or challenges are used in 13 different articles (43 %): arm-wrestle (*Rai News*, June 29th, 2019; *Il Giornale*, June 29th, 2019, *Washington Post*, June 26th, 2019), forcing the block (*Il Messaggero*, June 29th, 2019; *La Repubblica*, June 27th, 2019; *Rai News*, June 29th, 2019), at the end of their tether (*Euronews*, June 27th, 2019), be at loggerheads (*Corriere della Sera*, June 27th, 2019), the burst of the conflict (ibid.), blitz (*Il Messaggero*, June 27th, 2019), nerve war (*Kronen Zeitung*, June 29th, 2019), and so on. Other kinds of expressions not strictly drawn from military language are also used, but still with strong connotations: overreaching the limits (*Il Giornale*, June 29th, 2019), defy the nation's orders (*Washington Post*, June 26th, 2019), challenge to the authorities (*Il Giornale*, June 29th, 2019) or against the entry ban (*Corriere della Sera*, June 29th, 2019), get very hot under the collar (*Avvenire*, June 29th, 2019), all engines ahead (ibid.). As mentioned before, these expressions seem to present the events as if it were a battle between two different opponents, thus adding a polemic and sensational tone to a highly sensitive issue. In few cases, in particular in the online newspaper *Open* (June 29th, 2019) and, to a minor extent, in *Corriere della Sera* (June 29th, 2019), these expressions also exaggerate the details of specific events, such as the episode of the collision between the NGO boat and the GdF boat in the port of Lampedusa, emphasising the sensational tone.

Sarcasm is also used, often with a negative connotation. The article from the newspaper *La Sicilia* (June 28th, 2019) seems to set the sarcastic tone from the title: "Lampedusa, Sea Watch bloccata e intanto arriva un altro barchino…" (which can be translated as "Lampedusa: the Sea Watch is blocked, while another small boat arrives…", which compares the block imposed to the *Sea Watch 3* to the under-the-radar landing of an unregistered boat in Lampedusa, with the ellipsis at the end of the sentence adding further emotional disillusion to the issue of migrant arrivals. Both articles from the national newspaper *Il Giornale* also use a sarcastic tone either towards the issue of unregistered migrant arrivals or against the captain of the ship and the NGO more generally. In one article, the possibility to reach Italy autonomously with their own boat is deemed as "more convenient" (*Il Giornale*, June 20th, 2019) than being rescued by NGO boats, since it would allow migrants to "disappear in the national territory avoiding health controls and registrations". In another article from the same newspaper reporting on the disembarkation of the *Sea Watch 3*, "not only the representatives of the Italian 'do-gooders', which have now found a new leader to follow, but also the GdF were waiting for the captain" (*Il Giornale*, June 29th, 2019).

Given its negative connotations, the boundary between sarcasm and denigration seems really labile. The newspaper *Il Giornale* seems to cross it multiple times, demonstrating not only a significant misrepresentation of the topic, but also a profound disrespect towards both the migrants and the captain of the NGO boat. In the first article, the migrants rescued by the NGO become therefore a "human cargo of 43 migrants picked up in the sea" (*Il Giornale*, June 20th, 2019). In the other article (*Il Giornale*, June 29th, 2019), the reference to the "do-gooders" (in Italian, "buonisti"), which the Italian conservative right usually employs to negatively connote socially and politically active people or organisations that support migrants and their rights, constitutes not only a denigrating way to define people, but also a poor stylistic choice that reinforces the idea of the battle between two different factions. In commenting on the captain's decision to enter the port, the article from *Kronen Zeitung* (June 29th, 2019) states that Rackete has decided "to dock on the island of Lampedusa in order to bring the migrants 'to

safety'". However, it is not clear whether the choice of putting the last two words between inverted commas represents a quote or an ironic comment.

Although a less serious case of denigration, referring to the NGO captain by using her first name might imply, according to the cases, either a more emotional and friendly – although hidden – support towards her or, conversely, a negative consideration of her actions as childish and immature. In the catholic newspaper *Avvenire*, the use of the first name seems to conceal a certain leaning towards her, charging her actions with agency and responsibility: "Carola has done her move" (*Avvenire*, June 29th, 2019), thus the newspaper explains her choice to head towards the port and bring migrants to safety. When describing her arrest, the same article also refers to her as "a young woman", highlighting instead a more emotional and pitiful language. Although not using directly her first name, the article from *Al Jazeera* (June 29th, 2019) refers to Rackete as the "young, dreadlocked captain [who] has become a symbol of defiance and a left-wing hero in Italy for challenging Salvini's 'closed-ports' policy", thus highlighting and overstating her political role. In other cases, the use of the first name seems to blame the NGO captain of her excessive agency, as if she had committed something criminal for which she now has to be punished. The titles of two different newspapers highlight the potential consequences of Rackete's arrest (*Il Messaggero*, June 29th, 2019: "Carola risks 12 years") as a result of her culpable actions (*Corriere della Sera*, June 29th, 2019: "Captain Carola to the GdF after her arrest: 'I apologise'"). Also *Il Giornale* (June 29th, 2019) seems to blame the NGO captains' deeds, by saying that "Carola's actions have gone too far". Whether charged with emotional or blaming tone, however, the use of the first name constitutes a disrespectful linguistic choice.

5. Visualisation

Regarding their visual content, the articles present mostly pictures, images of tweets and videos. In 12 cases (40 %), articles show only one visual content (mostly a picture), while all the others use two or more. Visual data are generally in line with the content of the articles: They either depicta visual proof of the written content or enrich it, providing new information. The first case includes, among others, the graphical representation of tweets, pictures of the main protagonists, photo galleries or video of the main events (such as the moments of the docking of the boat or the disembarkation of crew and migrants). In the second case, new visual information is added to the written content: in an article from *Il Secolo XIX* (June 29th, 2019), a video depicts an interview of three of the five members of parliament that, in support with the NGO, had boarded the ship three days before the actual disembarkation, but this piece of information does not appear in the text. Similarly, an article from the same newspaper (*Il Secolo XIX*, June 27th, 2019) includes an interview with the then Minister of Transports and the then Minister of Agriculture and Tourism, but their comments are not quoted in the article.

In two cases (*Open* and *Corriere della Sera*), the visual data seem to confute the written content, with particular regard to the collision between the NGO and the GdF boat during the process of docking. Quoting an anonymous GdF source who says "They (the NGO members) rescue lives at sea and then they kill state officials", *Open* (June 29th, 2019) reports that the GdF boat has suffered "huge damages" from the collision with the NGO boat. Similarly, *Corriere della Sera* (June 29th, 2019) talks about a "manoeuvre that the GdF boat, crushed between the NGO boat and the dock, has in vain attempted to impede". However, the picture and the video that the

two articles report, respectively, do not show any particular consequence for the GdF boat, which managed to slip away before the *Sea Watch 3* docked.

In one case (another article from *Il Corriere della Sera*, June 12th, 2019), the video is completely decontextualised from the text. While the article reports on the initial rescue operations conducted by the *Sea Watch 3* off the Libyan coast, the final video shows the process of disembarkation of migrants in Lampedusa operated by *Sea Watch 3* on the previous 18th May, without any clarification or mentioning in the text or in the caption.

6. Controversy

Given their nature, the articles tend to present the events by stating the main facts and reporting the most important declarations - apart from the stylistic and linguistic differences and some noticeable exceptions previously analysed. However, it is noteworthy how the reports of this particular event - which not only depicts so controversial a topic as migration, but, as we have seen at the beginning, has also ramifications in international law and European migration policies - do not take into consideration the overarching legal and political context under which the event itself takes place. In two cases (*Die Presse*' and *Kronen Zeitung*), articles report that the captain has violated the law of the sea (Seerecht), but only national authorities are quoted and no further proof or analysis is given to corroborate this point. This, of course, is not necessarily evidence for bad or embedded journalism: As already mentioned, most of the articles present the main facts without particular comments or opinions. However, a brief overview of the surrounding context would have not only provided a more precise and grounded analysis, but also contributed to clarify certain aspects of the event itself and remove any doubts on the controversial declarations reported in the text.

In this respect, the main points of view presented are indeed from the declarations of Italian members of the government (in particular the then Italian Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini, but also the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and, to a minor extent, the Deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Enzo Moavero Milanesi). On the other hand, the points of view can be understood from the declarations of the NGO, either from the tweets of the captain or from its main representatives and spokespersons (such as Giorgia Linardi). Other points of view are also presented, providing further support to one thesis or the other: Italian politicians of the opposition (not only from the Democratic Party, but also from the group of members of parliament that went on board the *Sea Watch 3* during the standoff), European Commission representatives, other countries' members of government (in particular from the Netherlands during the debate with the Italian government, but also from France and Germany, who make remarks in support of the NGO), public prosecutors, church representatives and, in few cases, International Organisations' representatives and other NGOs' spokespersons or founders.

While an analysis of the different stylistic choices and ways to report the different points of view has already shown some interesting aspects, it is worth looking at how the general narrative is constructed using a specific point of view instead of others. In most articles, the declarations of Italian members of government and NGO representatives (or other European countries' members of government) are not only presented in a "conflictual" way, but they are also reported without any further analysis or counterargument. In this way the often strong and at times offensive declarations by the Italian Ministry of Interior (e.g. "I hope that a judge

will affirm that in that boat there are outlaws, starting from the captain. If the boat will be seized and the crew arrested, I will be glad", reports *Il Messaggero*, June 27th, 2019, while *Corriere della Sera*, June 27th, 2019, quotes "whoever helps human traffickers will face the consequences") are quoted without any further factual reply or critical analysis of migration policies, except for presenting another official declaration as an opposite point of view.

In most extreme cases, some newspapers either present only one point of view on the events or significantly overstate one (sometimes controversial) point of view vis-à-vis others. The short articles from the local newspapers *La Sicilia* (June 28th, 2019) and *Monreale Press* (June 29th, 2019), for example, mention only one point of view, without providing any further counterargument. The former quotes an interview that Salvini granted to a TV program, where he presented wrong information about POS and uncontested data on his policies without any possibility of control or rebuttal. Similarly, the latter reports on the events, quoting only the Italian Minister of Interior's point of view, which therefore remains uncontested.

Other articles, instead, tend to overstate some points of view, unbalancing the story narrative towards one side or the other. The article from *Il Giornale di Sicilia* (June 29th, 2019) represents an interesting example: although leaving out all declarations by politicians and members of government, the article reports the main facts through the point of view of GdF, which become the "protagonists" of the narration before concluding with a brief declaration from the NGO spokeswoman Giorgia Linardi. By a similar token, the online newspaper *Open* (June 29th, 2019) does report the declarations of the main protagonists of the events (in particular the Italian Minister of Interior and the *Sea Watch* lawyer), quoting also an anonymous source of GdF with a rather strong declaration that remains unverified (and actually confuted by the accompanying picture, see above).

7. Use of evidence-based research/science and missing facts

Given their nature, the great majority of articles selected include statements from Italian and other European countries' members of government, NGO spokespersons, European institutions' representatives, politicians of the opposition, and public prosecutors; however, none of them uses evidence-based research or scientific data, nor do they quote scientific or academic experts. In few cases, experts from international organisations are quoted, accompanied by data on migration and landings, but an overall analysis on migration movements and policies is blatantly missing. The three articles from *Corriere della Sera* seem particularly prone to quote external experts or members from international organisations. In its conclusion, the first article (*Corriere della Sera*, June 12th, 2019) presents some data on migrant deaths along the Mediterranean route provided by the NGOs *SOS Mediterranee* and *Doctors without borders* accompanied by quotes from their representatives, contradicts the data on landings provided by the Italian Minister of Interior, and eventually quotes a public statement by the UNHCR. The second article (*Corriere della Sera*, June 27th, 2019) reports on public declarations from a former ship captain and now member of parliament, defending the actions of captain Rackete. The third article (*Corriere della Sera*, June 29th, 2019) introduces some comments by Gino Strada, the founder of the NGO *Emergency*, pronouncing against the Italian policies on migration (an article from *Il Secolo XIX* also shows a video interview with the same NGO representative). However, the representation of data and quotes from international experts is generally insufficient, as it often concentrates on specific aspects of the event and

provides a partial support to one of the involved parties, without giving a more complete overview of the overarching legal and political framework surrounding the event itself.

International newspapers generally seem more prone to quote experts from international organisations and other NGOs. It is reasonable to assume, however, that most international journals do not cover the series of events in the Mediterranean Sea or the Italian/European migration management developments on an everyday basis. Therefore, they tend to present the news with more details and information. Both *Times of Malta* (June 27th, 2019) and *Al Jazeera* (June 29th, 2019), for example, include statements from the NGO *Proactiva Open Arms* spokeswoman and founder, respectively, with the former adding a quote from the UNHCR spokeswoman in Italy. The article from *The Washington Post* is the most interesting example in this respect: Although it does not provide any link to evidence-based research, it makes noticeable references to the European policy frameworks, with quotes from international human rights organisations' (specifically *Human Rights Watch*) and international institutions' representatives, such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, criticising Italian laws or the whole EU migration policy framework, respectively.

Not only do the articles barely mention evidence-based data, but they also fail to offer links to explore scientific articles or materials. Out of the 30 articles examined, 19 (63 %) provide links to deepen a certain argument or piece of information. However, they always refer to other articles from the same newspaper without any specific reference to external sources.

All articles, in conclusion, would benefit from a more careful examination of the bigger picture, in particular taking into consideration three main aspects:

- A better and more thorough reference to international law, which would help understand what is often presented as a "conflict" between the Italian Minister of Interior Salvini and the NGO captain Rackete in light of the international dispositions on rescue operations at sea.
- Current and historical data on migration movements and deaths in the Mediterranean Sea, with reference to the different routes deployed by migrants. Although some data are presented, especially with reference to the number of unregistered landings and migrant arrivals, these are by no means sufficient to understand the size and scope of migration flows – especially in a historical perspective – and, above all, to have a clearer view on the general picture.
- A more critical analysis of European and Italian migration policies based on those same data. Several articles make reference to the Italian laws, but only in order to report on the potential legal consequences for the captain and the NGO itself, in light of the decrees issued in the middle of the standoff. Other articles report on the debate between Italian and other European countries' members of government in relation to the country responsible for the disembarkation of migrants. However, not only do they omit to mention international laws on rescue at sea and relative responsibilities of boat captains and countries, but they also fail to analyse the elaboration and development of European migration policy frameworks, thus missing out an important, comprehensive aspect of the whole series of events.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, all the articles analysed could have benefitted from a better coverage of the main events by looking at the international legal framework on SAR operations at sea, or at the data on migration movements and deaths in the Mediterranean Sea in light of the development of migration management policies and practices at European and national level. When contemplating a broader perspective, it appears indeed clear that all the articles miss an important aspect of the events, failing to account for the overarching framework within which the supposed "conflict" between Italian authorities and NGOs has taken place. Besides, the lack of evidence-based research in all the articles represents another important missing aspect, which could have instead enriched the analysis and provided a broader historical perspective.

At a closer look, the analysis of the articles has shown that only one out of the 30 articles (namely *Il Giornale*, June 20th, 2019) has reported false information (in particular in relation to Tunisia as a POS). However, at least six other articles have either exaggerated certain aspects of the event, reported only one point of view, or presented (strong and controversial) declarations from politicians or Italian officials without verifying or counterarguing them, thus misrepresenting the main events and turning the scale in favour of specific stakeholders. Although adopting a more neutral tone, the remaining articles have tended to report on the main facts in a more balanced way. However, a more careful analysis of the stylistic choices, the particular language and the visual data that they have used has shown how even reports can hide a particular point of view or represent facts in a particular way. The table presents the level of misinformation from a quantitative point of view.

Tab. 1: Misrepresentation in analysed articles.

Number of articles that have misrepresented the topic by disinforming (intentional misleading information)	4 (13 %)
Number of articles that have misrepresented the topic by omission of information[5]	5 (16,5 %)
Number of articles that have provided a one-sided representation of the topic (which is as well the fact that they have not reflected the controversy and different issues at stake)	4 (13 %)
Number of articles that misrepresented the topic by not providing a critical interpretation or comment of the information shared[6]	27 (90 %)
Number of articles whose images and visuals were not related to the content of the article	3 (10 %)
Number of articles that misrepresented the topic by using titles that did not reflect the content of the article	2 (6,5 %)

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[5] All articles potentially lack information, in particular reference to the international law or the broader socio-political context. Therefore, only those articles have been included that miss some particular aspects of the event, thus making the report incomplete or misleading.

[6] All articles potentially lack a critical analysis of the main facts as they often do not take into consideration the broader framework within which the events unfold. Even the few articles that provide some critical comments often do so in a provocative and misleading way, thus reinforcing the misrepresentation of the topic.

The lack of a more comprehensive analysis of the legal framework, the absence of evidence-based research and the use of particular stylistic, linguistic or visual choice can be explained not only with the type of articles taken into consideration, but also with the general nature of the work of (online and offline) newspaper editorial staff, with the functioning of the online media environment, and with the target groups that they aim to reach. The high amount of information and the short time at disposal might prevent journalists from deepening certain topics or carrying out more thorough analyses, thus limiting their work to the collection and rearrangement of dispatches from national and international news agencies. Within a general crisis of the print media and the switch to online media, newspapers often have to provide a lot of media outputs in order to attract new readers and therefore generate more revenues from the advertisements. The increase in information outputs and the attempt to constantly extend the target group have necessarily reduced the average quality of online media. This, however, does not justify journalists from misrepresenting certain topics or from missing important information or data: the high quality of the information, the validation and verification of sources should remain the primary aim of every journalist.

Regarding the learning strategies that can be derived from these findings, some general suggestions are outlined here, which take into consideration their potential usability and transferability into other contexts. First, every event should be analysed by taking into consideration not only the micro-level details, but also the bigger picture within which the event unfolds. The term "bigger picture" here refers to (the critical analysis of) the historical, social, economic, political and legal conditions preceding and surrounding the event, which allow for a more complete and overarching understanding of the event itself. An interdisciplinary perspective is therefore fundamental to examine a single event and the overarching framework from multiple points of view. Second, every event should be examined by looking at the main data and information, in order to have a clearer view on the facts related to it. By the same token, all the opinions, statements or comments that might influence a point of view on a certain event should be screened out (or at least critically investigated). Third, it is of course important to keep in mind that an objective truth regarding an event is not only difficult to achieve but sometimes undesirable: data and facts can of course be interpreted, questions can be raised and discussions can consequently unfold, producing new developments and points of view through which we can look at events through a different perspective. Evidence-based and scientific discussions therefore represent the lifeblood for the advancement of knowledge, allowing the identification and elimination of mis/disinformation and the correct development of critical reasoning.

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ANNEX I – Summaries of five selected articles in English

Sea Watch blocked, but other 45 people land. Escorted to Lampedusa by the GdF and the Coast Guard. The NGO continues its legal battle
[Sea Watch bloccata, ma ne sbarcano altri 45. Scortati a Lampedusa da Fiamme gialle e Guardia costiera. L'Ong prosegue la battaglia legale]
Il Giornale, https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/sea-watch-bloccata-ne-sbarcano-altri-45-1713883.html

This relatively short article opens, using an ironic tone, with a brief report on the unregistered landing of 45 people, in juxtaposition to the *Sea Watch 3*, whose "human cargo of 43 immigrants picked in the sea" still awaits a permission to dock in front of the port of Lampedusa. With the same ironic tone, the article proceeds by saying that unregistered landings are actually more convenient, as they allow migrants to avoid medical checks and identification. Wishing a different conclusion for the *Sea Watch 3*, the final two paragraphs conclude on the legal battle between two NGOs (*Sea Watch* and *Mediterranean Saving Humans*) and the Regional Administrative Court, which rejected their appeal against the ban on entry and transit in the Italian territorial waters. The two NGOs, the article concludes, claim to abide by the international maritime law, although they ignored both Libya and above all Tunisia as closest POS.

Sea Watch, captain Carola to GdF officers after her arrest in Lampedusa: «I apologise to you»
[Sea Watch, la capitana Carola ai finanzieri dopo l'arresto a Lampedusa: «Vi chiedo scusa»]
Corriere della Sera, https://www.corriere.it/cronache/19_giugno_29/sea-watch-nave-entra-porto-lampedusa-notte-1f6d257a-99fe-11e9-8b1c-f8f873f23524.shtml

The article starts with the apologies of captain Rackete to the GdF for her manoeuvre during the docking of the ship. The introduction also comments on the arrest of the captain and the potential charges she might face, reporting declarations of a GdF officer and the District Attorney of Agrigento. The following paragraph contains a long quote by Mr. Salvini, who attacks the Dutch government and the MPs aboard the ship, defending the actions of the GdF, and by the Prime Minister, Mr. Conte, who defends the Italian laws. It concludes with a harsh comment by Mr. Gino Strada, the founder of the NGO *Emergency*, who attacks the "fascist" modalities of operation of the institutions. The following paragraphs report on the disembarkation of migrants and their potential redistribution within the EU, with the presence of both supporters and protesters at the dock. The article concludes with declarations from the NGO spokesperson, Ms. Giorgia Linardi, and from one of the MPs aboard the ship, Mr. Graziano Delrio.

Sea Watch, captain Rackete under house arrest. Salvini: «Expulsion, immediately»
[Sea Watch, la capitana Rackete ai domiciliari. Salvini: «Espulsione subito» – Il video dell'arresto]
Open, https://www.open.online/2019/06/29/la-sea-watch-e-entrata-nel-porto-di-lampedusa-il-video/

The article starts by summarising the main facts, reporting on the decision of the captain to enter the port despite the authorisation had been denied by the authorities. After expounding on the potential charges that the captain might face as a consequence of her manoeuvres, the article depicts the collision between the NGO ship and the GdF boat, quoting the District

Attorney of Agrigento (who "in the past had defended the operations of other NGOs"), anonymous sources of the GdF and the Italian Minister of Interior against the actions of captain Rackete. In the following paragraphs, contrasting declarations by Mr. Salvini and by the NGO lawyer and president are reported, highlighting once again, however, the potential charges that the captain might face. The article concludes with a description of the opposing factions on the dock waiting for the ship to arrive, and a brief account on the captain's decision to force the ban and lead the ship towards the port.

Sea Watch rams the Coast Guard cutter and enters the port. Captain arrested.
[La Sea Watch sperona motovedetta ed entra in porto. Arrestata la comandante]
Monreale Press, https://www.monrealepress.it/2019/06/29/la-sea-watch-sperona-motovedetta-ed-entra-in-porto-arrestata-la-comandante/?refresh_ce

This short article - which starts with a provocative and strong title - opens with a brief report on the moment of disembarkation of migrants and the arrest of the captain, who faces arrest for her "resistance or violence against a warship". The article continues with declarations by Mr. Salvini, who talks about the "criminal behaviour" of the captain, and the decision of the District Attorney of Agrigento to arrest the captain after having violated the halt imposed by the GdF. It concludes with a description of the arrest performed by GdF Commander of the Lampedusa section against the captain, who can be transferred in prison.

Sea Watch 3 **landed illegally: Captain arrested**
[Sea-Watch 3 legte illegal an: Kapitänin verhaftet]
Kronen Zeitung, https://www.krone.at/1950102

The article opens with a relatively strong title, and immediately highlights how the "nerve war" surrounding the *Sea Watch 3* has led to the arrest of captain Rackete, who has decided to ignore the order of the Italian military forces and bring migrants "to safety". The article continues by saying that the captain is accused of having violated the law of the sea (although no further detail is provided) and facilitated illegal immigration, while the NGO now risks potential fines and confiscations as a result of the recently approved "Security Decree". The following paragraphs describe the moment of the disembarkation, the crowd on the dock, and the potential redistribution of migrants across the EU, eventually quoting the captain on her decision to bring migrants to safety in Lampedusa and NGO representatives on their support to the captain's decision. It concludes by reporting the moment of the collision between the boats, with final declarations by Mr. Salvini on the redistribution of migrants within the EU.