Securitisation at the Mediterranean Frontier through Search and Rescue at Sea

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: search and rescue, border control, securitisation, European Union, discourse analysis.

The gravity of the Mediterranean migration crisis increased the urgency for an immediate call to action because of the many lives lost at sea. Search and Rescue operations were deployed by the European Union to prevent more migrant deaths. However, the operational conduct of the Search and Rescue operations revealed the security mandates with border control objectives and military anti-smuggler assets. This thesis examines how securitisation has affected the European Union’s Search and Rescue activities during the Mediterranean migration crisis. It focusses on the Italian Navy Operation Mare Nostrum, Frontex Joint Operation Triton, and EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia. Through discourse analysis and process-tracing, it investigates the development of the European Union’s Search and Rescue operations and the narratives used to legitimise the securitisation of these operations. The Paris School of Securitisation helps to explain the dynamic interplay between the agents, the acts and the context at hand. The analysis finds multiple securitisation chains active during the crisis period 2014-2019 as well as three significant narratives aiding the legitimisation of the European Union’s securitising moves; restructuring the external borders, creating a threat in numbers, and fighting the smuggler networks. The mismatch between the outward communication and the mandates and assets of the Search and Rescue operations presents itself as a decoupling of talk and action, under which the humanitarian concerns are used as a disguise for the enhancement of border management and migration containment through anti-smugglers instruments.

Word count: 23.544
“The scale of a humanitarian crisis is often expressed in statistics, but it is better measured in the lives and fates of real people.”

- Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on World Refugees Day 2019¹.

¹ https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/06/refugee-crisis-record-high-filippo-grandi/

The photo on the cover page of this MSc Thesis is taken from http://www.spectator.co.uk. Author of the drawing is not mentioned.
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CFSP</td>
<td>The Common Foreign and Security Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Council</td>
<td>The Council of the European Union</td>
</tr>
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<td>CS</td>
<td>Copenhagen School of Securitisation</td>
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<td>CSDP</td>
<td>The Common Security and Defence Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>The European Commission</td>
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<td>EEAS</td>
<td>The European External Action Service</td>
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<td>EP</td>
<td>European Parliament</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>EUNAVFOR Med</td>
<td>European Union Naval Force Mediterranean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frontex</td>
<td>European Coastguard and Border Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR/VP</td>
<td>High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Coordination Centre</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Office for Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mare Nostrum</td>
<td>Italian Navy Operation Mare Nostrum</td>
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<td>MRCC</td>
<td>Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>MS(s)</td>
<td>Member State(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO(s)</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation(s)</td>
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<td>PS</td>
<td>Paris School of Securitisation</td>
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<td>SAR</td>
<td>Search and Rescue</td>
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<td>Sophia</td>
<td>EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia</td>
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<td>Triton</td>
<td>Frontex Joint Operation Triton</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSCR</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council Regulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................... 1
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms ............................................................................. 4
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................... 5

1 Introduction ................................................................................................................ 7
  1.1 The Research Puzzle ............................................................................................ 8
  1.2 Relevance ............................................................................................................. 11
  1.3 Structure .............................................................................................................. 12

2 The Theory of Securitisation: Explaining Security Issues ..................................... 14
  2.1 Copenhagen School of Securitisation ................................................................ 14
    2.1.1 Security for whom, from what, by whom .................................................... 15
    2.1.2 Criticism on the Copenhagen School .......................................................... 18
  2.2 Paris School of Securitisation ............................................................................. 19
    2.2.1 Extended Assumptions ............................................................................... 19
    2.2.2 Definition of Securitisation ....................................................................... 23

3 Theoretical Framework and Methods: Applying Securitisation Theory .............. 25
  3.1 Case Study Design ............................................................................................... 25
  3.2 The EU as a Securitizing Actor .......................................................................... 26
  3.3 Levels of Analysis ............................................................................................... 27
  3.4 Methodological Techniques .............................................................................. 31
    3.4.1 Process-Tracing ......................................................................................... 31
    3.4.2 Discourse Analysis ..................................................................................... 33
  3.5 Data Collection ................................................................................................... 34
  3.6 Data Analysis ..................................................................................................... 35

4 Historical Context: Illustrating The Migratory Routes ......................................... 37
  4.1 The Eastern Mediterranean Route ..................................................................... 37
  4.2 The Central Mediterranean Route .................................................................... 39
  4.3 The Western Mediterranean Route ................................................................... 41

5 The European Union’s Search and Rescue Activities ............................................ 42
  5.1 Italian Navy Operation Mare Nostrum ............................................................... 43
  5.2 Frontex Joint Operation Triton .......................................................................... 44
  5.3 EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia ................................................................. 47
  5.4 Non-Governmental Operations ........................................................................... 49

6 The Narratives on Security Practices .................................................................... 51
  6.1 Restructuring the External Borders .................................................................... 52
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Creating a Threat in Numbers</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Fighting Smugglers with Extraordinary Means</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Findings and Conclusion</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Answering the Research Question</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.1</td>
<td>The ‘What’</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.2</td>
<td>The ‘Who’</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.3</td>
<td>The ‘How’</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Limitations and Recommendations</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Final Reflections</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>References</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Primary Data Collection</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: List of Figures</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 INTRODUCTION

A small child is dangling from a fourth-storey balcony. The neighbour cannot reach the boy to reel him inside again, and bystanders on the street watch the scene even more helplessly. All of a sudden, a young man scales up the tall building with Spiderman-like movements and grabs the 4-year old to safety. The name of this young man is Mamoudou Gassama, an undocumented Malinese migrant living in France. His heroic deed was filmed, and Gassama was personally rewarded French citizenship by President Macron after the video went viral. The official decree announcing his official citizenship stated how “this act of great bravery exemplifies the values which help unite our national community, such as courage, selflessness, altruism and taking care of the most vulnerable”\(^2\) (BBC, 2018).

Few people know, however, that Gassama is one of the many migrants\(^3\) who have crossed the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. After several failed attempts, he only successfully reached Italy when his crowded boat was rescued by a humanitarian vessel (Financial Times, 2019). While his road to citizenship story is exceptional, his road to Europe story is not. He was 1 out of 116,647 people to set foot on European soil in 2018. During the peak of arrivals via de Mediterranean Sea in 2015, an estimated 1,015,877 migrants reached the European shores (UNHCR, 2019). Within this data, for every 51 arrivals by sea in Europe in 2018, one death is counted (Ibid.). The predominant cause of death is drowning. The Missing Migrant Project reveals figures with estimates of 3,670 undocumented migrants perishing en route while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 (IOM, 2019).

While migrants have long used the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe, the Mediterranean’s current crisis started in 2013. In October 2013, a boat carrying hundreds of refugees from Libya to Italy sank near the Italian island of Lampedusa (UNHCR, 2015). At least 515 people on board drowned. The Italian Coast Guard and local fishers managed to rescue 155 survivors. A week later, another boat sank after capsizing near Lampedusa, increasing the migrant death toll on the Mediterranean Sea. The shipwrecks at Lampedusa represent a turning point in Europe’s migration crisis. These drownings shocked Italy, as well as the world, and were reported globally. With Lampedusa functioning as a gateway to Europe, those seeking safety have often entered European soil only as dead bodies – not accounting for those who went missing during the sea crossing (Cuttitta, 2014). The lack of legal routes

\( ^2 \) « cet acte de grande bravoure a illustré de façon exemplaire certaines des valeurs qui contribuent à lier les membres de la communauté nationale tels que le courage, le désintérêtement, l’altruisme, l’attention portée aux plus vulnérables » (Le Parisien, 2018).

\( ^3 \) Although the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ constitute of crucial differences, especially with regards to legislation, the media often uses the terms interchangeably. Refugees are protected under the 1851 Refugee Convention and are entitled to basic rights because they were forced to flee their home country. Migrants are, however, processed under the receiving country’s immigration laws because it is assumed they choose to resettle in search of a better life (Martinez, 2015).
often leaves no choice for those seeking safety but to turn to smugglers, at enormous costs and danger to their lives, to cross the Mediterranean waters in the hope of safety\(^4\).

![Figure 1.1: Mediterranean Sea Routes to Europe (UNHCR, 2015, p. 9).](image)

1.1 The Research Puzzle

The gravity and severity of the situation in the Mediterranean increased the urgency for an immediate call to action. During the peak of the crisis in 2015, the European Council declared the situations as a tragedy and proclaimed to “mobilise all efforts at its disposal to prevent further loss of life at sea and to tackle the root causes of the human emergency that we face. [...] Our immediate priority is to prevent more people from dying at sea” (PRES/204/15). This humanitarian statement was poignant because the EU had not yet adequately addressed the crisis at its external borders – as opposed to the migration crisis in its internal borders – to fall under its competences and responsibilities.

To prevent more losses of life at sea, Search and Rescue Operations were provided as the solution. Search and Rescue (SAR) operations are defined within the EU context as the “obligation to render assistance to any vessel or person in distress at sea [...] in accordance with international law and respect for fundamental rights, [...] regardless of the nationality or status of such a person or the circumstances in which that person is found” (Regulation (EU) 656/2014). However, the Union’s SAR activities seem to operationally merge with border control objectives (Ghezelbash & et al., 2018). The operations deployed by the EU always have the dual objective of saving lives, and the monitoring of

\(^4\) See figure 1.1
the EU common external borders within relevant fashion. Under the allocation of competences in the EU Treaties, border control has pre-eminence over SAR activities (Ghezelbash & et al., 2018).

When addressing the causes of the Mediterranean crisis, policymakers, the international media, and academics have predominantly pointed out the border security rationale. The prevailing view is that the crisis is a security problem, mainly emanating from armed conflicts in the Arab world. The Mediterranean crisis is framed as a consequence of violence committed elsewhere. The fear exists that the violence might be transferred to the EU by the medium of the Mediterranean crisis. The situation is presented as a legal and political vacuum, with focus on the securitisation and militarisation of migration and border controls (Perkowski, 2016). Therefore, the EU's external borders are perceived to need reinforcement in consonance with the border security rationale.

Nonetheless, recent announcements of the Mediterranean crisis have also become more distinctly humanitarian (Perkowski, 2016). The crisis is linked to human despair with a growing emphasis on tragic deaths, large-scale suffering, and the lack of necessary provisions. The humanitarian rationale claims that the migrants are fleeing from the specific factors the border security rationale lists as reasons to strengthen the external frontiers. Examples contributing to this humanitarian rationale are the responses to the image of the toddler Aylan Kurdi who washed up on a Turkish beach in the summer of 2015, and media records of the drowning of hundreds of individuals off the coasts of Lampedusa, Malta, and Lesbos.

Although the humanitarian rationale could be considered the catalyst for the strengthening of SAR operations, it did not entail a shift from border security rationale (Perkowski, 2016). The EU presents its humanitarian values and goals as a priority in the Mediterranean crisis, yet a continuation of security-based policies and practices exists behind the surface. The substance and objectives of EU mandates seem to differ significantly with the SAR mandates humanitarian NGOs prescribe to. These divergences demonstrate that the meaning of humanitarian objectives very much depends on who is acting (Desvachez, 2015). In light of recent events in the Mediterranean, it is becoming tough to ignore the politic reality in which the EU is faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, politicisation tactics consist of tightening the border control, even leaning towards the securitisation of the external borders. On the other hand, politicisation arises with regards to a greater focus on the suffering of migrants. This area at the frontier of Europe seems to function as a magnifying lens for current polarisation, where politics stand face-to-face.

Previous research has been carried out on the EU’s border governance, yet there have been few empirical investigations into understanding the association between the Mediterranean SAR operations and the securitisation narratives. A considerable amount of literature has been published
on securitisation theory and migration. Nonetheless, the generalisability of much-published research on this issue is problematic. The research to date has tended to focus on securitisation as an overarching theory for migration policies in general, rather than the application of the theory on specific migration domains that seem to be employing securitising narratives. Only a few authors have been able to draw on any systematic research into this; this indicates a need to understand the various perceptions of securitisation that exist among the Mediterranean crisis and the SAR operations employed by the EU in this region.

The research objective of this thesis is twofold: to analyse the processes that led to the EU’s decision to deploy several SAR operations, and to analyse what effects the security discourses and narratives of the EU had on its SAR operations. This thesis is inspired by a desire to understand and explore the role of security discourses on the conduct and development of EU migration policy. It is this desire that led to the choice of approaching the research objective through the theory of securitisation with the means of sequential analysis and discourse analysis. A multi-method approach to this theory can shed light on the EU’s decisions to deploy multiple SAR operations to the waters of the Mediterranean Sea to take control of the unfolding migration crisis.

The aim is to demonstrate how elements of securitisation could be observed in a means that is intended to be humanitarian at first sight, and how security assessments evolve and develop with regards to SAR in particular, and the Mediterranean migration crisis in general. I contend that the presentation of the migration crisis as a threat against the interests of the Union was imperative for the decision to deploy its SAR operations in the Mediterranean Sea. The theory of securitisation can help answer questions on the strategic construction of migration as an existential threat and on the processes that led to the deployment of SAR operations. These considerations resulted in the following research question:

**How has securitisation affected the European Union’s Search and Rescue Activities during the Mediterranean migration crisis?**

The following subquestions are formulated to guide the analytical framework towards answering the research question:

1. How are political situations or events related to the Mediterranean migration crisis securitised?
2. How have the European Union’s Search and Rescue Operations evolved during the Mediterranean migration crisis?
3. Which narratives are used to legitimise the European Union’s securitising moves throughout the Search and Rescue Operations?

In this thesis, I argue two significant points. First, I argue that the securitising moves by the EU are portrayed to be of humanitarian character in order to gain support from its audience for the deployment and mandate of the Search and Rescue operations. Second, I argue that the evolvement of the Search and Rescue operations and their accompanying securitising narratives have played a significant role in shaping the EU’s security practices into a more hard-line territory.

1.2 RELEVANCE

The scientific relevance of this study is twofold. First, the research contributes to the state-of-the-art of migration studies. In particular, it contributes to the investigation of migration between North-Africa and Europe by examining the role of the European Union in maritime missions across the Mediterranean. The academic field of migration studies is also advanced by using the multi-method approach of discourse analysis and especially process-tracing. Second, it makes a theoretical contribution to Security Studies and European Studies alike by conceptualising how securitising moves are disguised as humanitarian concerns by the European Union. By doing so, the securitisation debate is shifted into a broad spectrum of securitisation application and sheds light onto how policymakers within the European Union securitise in relation to non-EU actors as well.

Additionally, the research provides a source of insights into how EU institutions balance the contradictory expectations at the hands of maritime security and Search and Rescue. The incompatibility between the norms and interests of the European Union proves to be a challenge. Therefore, this research investigates the underlying narratives that ultimately dictate the operational direction of the European Union. It does so by systematically mapping the gap between the rhetorical adherence of the European Union to the prevailing humanitarian norms and the actual operational conduct of the deployed operations during SAR activities and occasions. The literature on the securitisation of SAR activities is scarce; while numerous studies exist that focus on migration across the Mediterranean in general, the academic literature concerning search and rescue is limited.

An analysis of the Search and Rescue conduct of the European Union is of great societal importance. It offers insights as to how the EU frames its securitising moves concerning a topic that is highly controversial, namely migration. The securitisation on Search and Rescue by the European Union affects people on a daily basis. It is, however, not visible daily as most people tend to close their eyes to the suffering on the Mediterranean. The people crossing the Mediterranean sea are a specifically vulnerable social group, as they often seek protection and safety from violence and
oppression in their countries of origins. It is difficult to imagine that the decision to flee and leave everything you love and know behind, would be an easy overnight decision to make.

An analysis of the securitisation of Search and Rescue has relevance beyond academics. It provides insights into the reasoning and narrating of securitisation by grand institutions such as the European Union. Such insights could help grassroots NGO’s to improve the quality of their behaviour and operational conduct in relation to the institutions they face on the ground. It can also offer opportunities for critical self-awareness for security practitioners to discover what real-life implications their decision and policymaking capacities entail.

1.3 STRUCTURE
The outline for this thesis is as follows. Chapter 1 is the introduction in which the scope of the thesis is presented, as well as a prologue to the context of the case study. Chapter 2 discusses the theory of securitisation. Specifically, it discusses the Copenhagen School of Securitisation and the Paris School of Securitisation. The latter provides the theoretical framework, which is discussed in chapter 3. Chapter 3 also elaborates upon how the theory of securitisation is applied within the theoretical as well as the methodological framework. Hereby, the levels of analysis are of particular interest to the operationalisation of the theory of securitisation. It also provides the conceptualisation of the EU and what is meant by the EU as the securitising actor.

Chapter 4 provides contextual detail on the case of the maritime Mediterranean crisis by illustrating the development of the migratory routes. The three main routes are included to encompass a broader context in which the crisis has evolved. The incorporation of these migratory routes is essential because the routes have significantly influenced how SAR operations have developed throughout the crisis. The SAR operations are what they are today because of how the migratory routes emerged.

Chapter 5 studies the Search and Rescue operations, which were – and are still – deployed by the European Union. The focus lays with Italian Navy Operation Mare Nostrum, Frontex Joint Operation Triton, and EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia. This chapter analyses the process the operations underwent with regards to their operational capacity, resources, mandates, and other relevant instruments. This chapter helps to delineate the successive but also overlapping structures of the operations. Additionally, this chapter briefly takes into account the other relevant SAR actors active at the Mediterranean Sea and their respective relationship with the EU.

Chapter 6 examines the discursive and non-discursive elements of the narratives the EU uses to justify their securitising moves throughout the deployed SAR operations. It does so by elaborating
further on the proposed levels of analysis following the Paris School of Securitisation. In particular, it aims to answer the ‘how’ of the research question by highlighting pivotal moments of securitisation. The chapter takes into account several speeches and statements made by important EU actors and compares their use of language with the actual use of instruments or resources of the SAR operations.

Chapter 7 discusses the findings of the previous chapters and answers the research questions. It takes stock of the different levels of analysis as explained in chapter 3, and compares the analyses of chapters 4, 5 and 6 in order to portray the chains of securitisation which became visible throughout the research. Moreover, this chapter elaborates upon the limitations of the research and subsequently makes suggestions for further research. It is concluded by some final – personal – reflections on the topic.
2 THE THEORY OF SECURITISATION: EXPLAINING SECURITY ISSUES

The following chapter describes in greater detail the process of securitisation, and what securitisation means in practice. Securitisation Theory knows different schools of thought that differ in their ontological and epistemological implications. In general, Securitisation Studies are concerned with the construction of threats and explains how such threats emerge, spread, and dissolve (Balzacq, 2011). Securitisation theory provides a well-equipped lens which enables this study to explain and understand the attitude of the EU, and possibly other actors, towards SAR Operations.

The theoretical discussion is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the Copenhagen School of Securitisation (CS), which conceptualised securitisation theory. The CS is represented through academics such as Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde. It is known for ‘widening’ the security debate into more sectors, rather than solely military. Consequently, as the CS is one of the ‘founding fathers’ of securitisation theory, it received some criticism as well, especially with regards to its methodological implications and other limitations.

The second part follows this critique into a new approach, which is a complementary extension of the CS, namely the Paris School of Securitisation (PS). Thierry Balzacq introduces three core assumptions for securitisation theory, which sharpen the security debate. Moreover, he demonstrates the importance of and relationships between several levels of analysis in the securitisation process. The PS approach is useful for securitisation analysis because the recent increase of deathly tragedies on the Mediterranean has triggered an institutionalised approach to SAR operations on several levels.

2.1 COPENHAGEN SCHOOL OF SECURITISATION

Since the end of the Cold War, the so-called Copenhagen School of Security Studies brought the concept of securitisation into the academic agenda. The Post-Cold War period needed reframing of security matters to examine new global security dynamics and what measures were needed in order to understand securitisation practices (Watson, 2006). The traditional approach to security was characterised by just one referent object for security, namely the state; this implied that the state was the only object that could be threatened and needed to be protected. The CS widened security conceptions by synthesising a constructivist and realist approach in order to add the categories of environment, economics, society and politics to the concept of security, instead of solely military (Ibid.).

The widening of the security debate, in terms of the referent object, also implied inclusion of different kinds of security, such as human security, regional security, and gender security (Eroukhmanoff, 2017). For many years, these security phenomena were surprisingly neglected by
scholars and politicians. Widening the security agenda from multiple perspectives brought more actors into focus by placing them as the focus of security calculations and by demonstrating that culture, identity and security are intertwined (Ibid.).

The CS has thus ultimately lead to an expansion of the definition of security from the military sector only, towards the environmental, the social, the political, and the economic sector. All of these sectors are intertwined and contain integral elements of extensive security complexes (Buzan, 1983). A security complex within the multi-sectoral approach is defined as “a set of [actors] whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their [national] security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another” (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). Therefore, security “is about survival” (Ibid., p. 21).

2.1.1 Security for whom, from what, by whom

The CS adopts an analytic framework in which objects are not universally given, but instead are discursively constructed through framing characteristics and meanings through intersubjective interaction (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). Within this framework, a spectrum is provided to describe the concept of security and to determine how an issue can be moved to be non-politicised, politicised, and securitised (Emmers, 2013). A non-politicised issue is not present in the public debate and therefore does not require state action. A politicised issue has become part of the public debate, that is to say, it is within the scope of public policy and does require state action, albeit within the scope of a regular government decision. Issues that are securitised, however, require emergency measures which are beyond the government’s standard political procedures (Ibid.).

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<th>Non-Politicized</th>
<th>Politicized</th>
<th>Securitized</th>
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<td>the State does not cope with the issue.</td>
<td>The issue is managed within the standard political system.</td>
<td>The issue is framed as a security question through an act of securitisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The issue is not included in the public debate.</td>
<td>It is “part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations or, more rarely, some form of communal governance” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 23)</td>
<td>A securitizing actor articulates an already politicized issue as an existential threat to a referent object.</td>
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*Figure 2.1: Securitisation Spectrum (Emmers, 2013, p. 134).*

The securitisation spectrum illustrates the political stages before securitisation. An issue can move back and forth between the stages. However, before an issue is transformed into the political stage of securitisation and thus framed as a security issue, it needs to meet a set of criteria. These

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5 See figure 2.1
criteria are as follows: 1) a securitizing actor or the entity that makes and/or creates the securitizing move or statement; 2) an existential threat that has been identified as potentially harmful; 3) the referent object which is defined as the object that is being threatened and thus needs protection; and 4) the audience which is the target of the securitisation acts and thus needs to be persuaded and accept the issue as a security threat (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998).

In brief, a securitisation act hence occurs when a securitisating actor convinces an audience to accept that an issue is an existential threat for the referent object(s), and therefore an immediate policy response is required to mitigate it (Balzacq, 2005, p. 173). It is often incited when a situation of emergency, or urgency is declared (Emmers, 2013). The critical element is ultimately to convince the audience, whose acceptance is pivotal for successful securitisation. Securitising moves can never be crudely imposed, but need to be argued for, as they rest on common coercion and consent (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998).

Theoretically, this implies that actors frame issues through articulating security with priority and urgency. Subsequently, any implementations of extraordinary measures to ‘secure’ security are potentially legitimised (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). Practically, this implies everything could be constructed as a security issue through a securitisating move, such as a speech act. Subsequently, if the securitisating speech act is successful, the security issue moves from ‘politicisation’ to ‘securitisation’ (Emmers, 2013). Likewise, de-securitisation implies the opposite pattern, in which security issues are moved from the urgent, emergency level back into the standard political arena.

Often, an act of securitisation is combined of two separate stages (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998; Emmers, 2013). On the one hand, a political decision needs to be expressed to frame an issue or situation as an existential threat. The political act is framed to convince the target audience of the existential threat. On the other hand, the language of security also needs to be adopted for the issue to be composed out of a political, as well as a security act. If the language of security is spoken, the opportunity to ask for the adoption of extraordinary measures by the government arises. Again, the key to the adoption of such measures is the level of acceptance by the audience. These stages, however, also highlight the blurriness between politicisation and securitisation (Emmers, 2013). Actors can pursue securitisation as a means of politicisation because it suits their political motivations more competently.

Securitisation ‘departs’ from politicisation through the framing of a specific issue as an existential threat, while that same issue is accepted by a target audience as existentially threatening (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). Issues are considered as existentially threatening when they are conceived to be of greater importance than other issues. Its importance might be exaggerated and
amplified, yet such a presentation enables actors to elevate the issue above others in terms of priority. Therefore, security and national security issues can be considered to be socially constructed (Ibid, p. 24). National security issues do not inherently carry dangerous components of itself, rather than through their presentation and acceptance as such.

According to the CS, without the latter acceptance, extraordinary measures cannot be implemented in order for a national security issue to become securitised. The acceptance of the audience is imperative for securitisation, whether this is public opinion, organisations, or politicians (Emmers, 2013). The logic within this is that national security issues are wished to be treated outside of the reasonable bounds of administrative procedures. To impose extraordinary political procedures requires the use of counteractions (Ibid., p. 139).

It is worth notetaking that, according to the CS, an act of securitisation can still be successful even when the majority of a population rejects the idea of the existential threat and does not recognise it as such (Collins, 2005). The acceptance of a threat by a smaller audience, like the political elites or essential state institutions, can also lead to a successful securitisation move (Emmers, 2013; Collins, 2005). Hence, it can be deduced that the CS argues that the position of power of the securitising actor and the audience is influential in deciding whether securitisation occurs, rather than the relative size and numbers of them.

“The main argument of securitisation theory is that security is a (illocutionary) speech act, that solely by uttering ‘security’ something is being done. ‘It is by labeling something a security issue that it becomes one’ (Waever, 2004, p. 13). By stating that a particular referent object is threatened in its existence, a securitizing actor claims a right to extraordinary measures to ensure the referent object’s survival. The issue is then moved out of the sphere of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics, where it can be dealt with swiftly and without the normal (democratic) rules and regulations of policy-making. For security this means that it no longer has any given (pre-existing) meaning but that it can be anything a securitizing actor says it is. Security is a social and intersubjective construction” (Taureck, 2006, p. 54)

In brief, the portrayal and acceptance of an existential threat are considered to be the most crucial aspect of securitisation for the CS. The portrayal by an actor and acceptance by an audience are determined throughout the articulation of speech acts. The speech acts behave as the centre of securitisation (Buzan, Waever, & De Wilde, 1998; Emmers, 2013). It is irrelevant for speech acts whether the threat is threatening or not, as long as it is perceived to be as such by an audience in position. This hypothesis of the CS is considered to be limited and incomplete by several other securitisation scholars. The criticism on the CS is discussed in the following section.
2.1.2 Criticism on the Copenhagen School

The central premise of the CS is that actors can be placed either under a declaratory and persuasive role – actors who frame a security issue – or under an assenting and conferring role – actors who agree with and enable the proposed securitisation (Watson, 2006). This unambiguous identification and separation of securitising actors from audiences has been subject to scrutiny from other scholars. Although such identification seems clear-cut, it harbours a level of abstraction, which makes it difficult to understand or implement the CS in an empirical analysis of the process (Ibid.). According to critics, the CS falls short on a systematic approach to study non-traditional security challenges, because the why and how questions are not sufficiently asked nor answered in the original framework.

The majority of the criticism on the original securitisation theory by the CS is based upon its linguistic focus on speech act mechanism and its discursive context (Salter, 2011). The speech act mechanism focuses primarily on the audience. The audience is key in accepting a securitised issue as an issue is only securitised “only if and when the audience accepts it as such” (Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). However, the CS theory fails to acknowledge what this audience could consist of. The concept is argued to be underdeveloped and in need of a better definition (Balzacq, 2011).

An audience could be compromised of multiple differentiating groups, even to an extent in which can be spoken of multiple target audiences. Relevant for this thesis in this regard could be the EU Member States. Some MSs might accept a securitising speech act; others might not. If the latter occurs, a speech act could be altered through partial disapproval. Critics argue that speech acts are, therefore, not a “simple, straightforward diatribe between actor and audience” (Mak, 2006). Instead, speech acts could be subject to the influence of the audience or even multiple audiences. Explicit consent by the audience is, therefore, not a necessity (McDonald, 2011). This argument could swing both ways, implying that if explicit consent is not a necessity, autonomous political elites or other securitising actors could also determine policy outcomes (Ibid.).

On another note, the demarcation of the definition of the audience is also blurred with the definition of the referent object. These concepts are strongly interrelated, as according to traditional securitisation theory, it is often the audience who needs to be protected (the referent object) from the existential threat (Watson, 2006). For instance, in this thesis, the constructed existential threat could be the migrants who cross the Mediterranean Sea. Migrants are often portrayed as a threat in the media to society as a whole because of reasons such as the threat of terrorism, a threat to the national identity, etcetera. The referent object could be society, albeit in independent societal MSs, or the European society in general. However, the audience would be that same society – on a supranational or national level – which needs to accept the securitising move from the securitising actor. The
audience could also possibly be, even next to the MSs, some political elites who can determine policy outcomes. To blur the lines, even more, these political elites might partly be playing the role of the securitising actor as well. This blurriness of definitions and concepts makes it hard to analyse securitising acts in practice.

2.2 PARIS SCHOOL OF SECURITISATION

The CS converges around the acceptance of the audience as a distinctive feature of securitisation theory (Balzacq, 2011). Nonetheless, the original securitisation theory could benefit from clarifications on the types and functions of the audience(s). Critique of the Copenhagen definition of the audience often suggests a causal approach to securitisation theory by referring to how the audience does or (partially) does not agree to back up a securitising claim. The original assumption of an accepting audience contributes to growing blurriness in other aspects of the securitisation act and its actors.

This yields problems of inference, as explained through the example of posing migrants as the existential threat in the previous section (Ibid.). Nor does the original assumption elaborate on securitisation as an inter-subjective process. The Paris School of Securitisation, with Thierry Balzacq as its leading scholar, therefore proposes a theoretical framework in which the audience is solely one element in securitisation studies. The Paris framework integrates alternative ideas into the formation of security issues and how a threat is established through discursive politics.

The underlying rationale of the PS is based upon a ‘sociological’ form of securitisation, whereas the CS prescribes to a ‘philosophical’ form through its linguistic focus. The sociological approach of the PS claims that securitisation can be viewed as a strategic or pragmatic process (Balzacq, 2011), with no detachment from “practices, context, and power relations that characterise the construction of threat images” (p. 1). Hence, the PS does not disapprove of the CS – it even incorporates substantial aspects of it – but demonstrates implications which relate securitisation to an inclusive reality.

2.2.1 Extended Assumptions

In order to improve the empirical framework of securitisation that the CS established, Balzacq (2005; 2008; 2011) puts forward three underlying assumptions. These assumptions may be viewed as an extension to the CS, albeit in a corrected version to the previous critique. The three assumptions are “respectively 1) the centrality of the audience; 2) the co-dependency of agency and context; and 3) the dispositif and the structuring force of practices” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 8; Balzacq, 2005). Through this reformulation of securitisation theory into more than one assumption, a foundation is provided for a coherent theory development in which intersubjectivity, context, and practices are accounted for.
In the CS, the nature and status of the ‘significant audience’ remain unaccounted for (Balzacq, 2005). The audience-centred assumption in the PS approach does, however, account for these aspects. The PS assumes that it is necessary for the securitising actor to be able to identify with the audience’s needs and interests. The success of securitisation is highly contingent upon this aspect of identification in order to achieve a perlocutionary effect; meaning that a consequential effect, intended or not, is achieved by the securitising actor, such as persuading, scaring, convincing, or otherwise affecting the addressees.

If the audience is not able to identify with the securitising actor, it is less likely that the audience will perceive the constructed existential threat as a security issue, because the audience is more likely to have an alternating perspective on the issue. In order to identify with the audience, securitising actors should keep in mind what stereotypes, thoughts and beliefs they hold and which of those prevail among the target audience they need to identify with for successful securitisation.

Although the audience is still centred within this assumption, the audience can be distinguished into two kinds of supports (if any) – formal and moral (Balzacq, 2011). Formal and moral support can be congruent, which opens up the opportunity of a successful securitisation act, or not. While they may be congruent, they should not be conflated, as they are of different status and nature (Ibid.). For an audience to give moral support, it needs to have a direct causal connection to the desired goals of the security issue. In this case, the audience may be the general public, but it could also be an institutional body.

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6 According to the study of linguistics, a total speech act situation is a combination of three types of linguistic acts; 1) locutionary – the utterance of an expression that contains a given sense and reference, like uttering the word ‘emergency’; 2) illocutionary – the act performed in articulating a locution, such as giving the actual speech in which you say emergency; and 3) perlocutionary – the ‘consequential effects’ that are aimed to evoke the feelings, thoughts or action of the audience (Balzacq, 2011, pp. 4-5).

Or simply put, “To say something, to act in saying something, to bring about something through acting in saying something” (Habermas, 1984, p. 289).
To gain moral support is pivotal for the securitising actor because of the support conditions formal backing (Balzacq, 2011). A formal decision is often mandatory before the securitising actor can adopt extraordinary measures against the existential threat. Examples of formal support are in the form of a parliamentary vote or a council decision. Moral support is necessary, yet insufficient for a successful securitisation act. Formal support is, generally speaking, necessary and sufficient for a successful act of securitisation. It is sufficient because such a formal vote or decision alters the policy outcomes into the favour of the securitising actor.

**Assumption 2: The Co-dependency of Agency and Context**

“The semantic repertoire of security is a combination of textual meaning – knowledge of the concept through language (written and spoken) – and cultural meaning – knowledge gained through previous interactions and current situations. Thus, the performative dimension of security rests between semantic regularity and contextual circumstances.” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 11)

The context-dependent assumption of the PS, like the CS, claims that the usage of security language and speech acts modify the context of the (to be) securitised issue. Unlike the CS, Balzacq (2005) assumes that such a usage is also to be aligned with an external context as well, instead of solely an internal (textual) context; this means that a contextual alignment should be independent of any textual or language context.

For clarification, the baseline assumption of the CS is that solely uttering the word ‘security’ has plenty of agency already to alter the previous state of affairs. Hence, the speech act is central in the CS’s view of securitisation, because this approach allows for modifying the context by linguistic utterances. Security does, therefore, not necessarily demonstrate an objective reality. Securitisation, according to the CS, thus conveys a self-referential practice to alleviate ‘situations of insecurity’. However, this approach does not answer how existential threats are constructed outside of rhetorical construction. Alternatively, better put: it neglects the situations of insecurity which are “out there”, regardless if these are shaped or constructed throughout rhetoric (Balzacq, 2011, p. 12). Such securitisation does not differentiate between “institutional” or “brute” threats (Ibid.).

Institutional threats are constructed throughout the internal context and are the mere products of communicative tools, such as a speech act. Brute threats are the threats that ‘just’ exist without any language mediation to formulate what they are: hazards to (human?) life. Language does not construct reality (Balzacq, 2011). Yes, it may shape the perception of our reality. Such a perception neither equals the essence of a problem or situation, nor it is empirically credible for analysing

7 The focus here lays on the threat for humans. Yet, securitisation may be extended into more hazardous aspects. For example, hazards to ecological life (Watson, 2006).
securitisation. For instance, the essence and the brute threat of an earthquake are not changed, even if the securitising actor does not securitise it through words. The threat is still there.

The PS, therefore, argues that some security problems “are the attribute of the development itself” (Balzacq, 2011, pp. 12-13). For analysis, this implies that external contexts and their understandings should be included for securitisation. The internal context needs to resonate with the external context to move the attention of the audience towards the securitised issue if the issue is to be construed as dangerous (Ibid., p. 13). In theoretical terms; a positive perlocutionary effect (successful securitisation) rests upon the connection of the illocutionary act (speech act, security statements) with the external reality to win an audience. If this relation would not be necessary, the ‘conduct from the masses’ would be irrelevant in any situation because political elites could ultimately shape the discourse of society (Ibid.).

The logic behind this reasoning is quite simple. When the concept ‘security’ is uttered, the audience will feel the need to ‘search’ or to ‘look around’ for this security – or insecurity – in order to identify the presumed threats that justify the articulation. Thus, the external context in which the audience is searching for verifying conditions has the agency in itself to ‘select’ or to ‘conceal’ these verifying conditions. Sometimes, the threat is not there to see for the audience, even if the political elites claim the presence of the threat. The current situation of the securitisation of climate change is an excellent example of this. Climate change is not directly ‘visible’ through the eyes of (some of) the audience, and therefore, the threat of climate change is neglected by the audience or even regarded as non-threat.

The agency and the context are thus co-dependent. The rhetorical agency can catalyse the sense of urgency, yet needs to be reflective of the external context that resonates with the audience. The semantic repertoire is, therefore, a combination of textual meaning and cultural meaning, which all together form a frame of reference for the audience through which security issues are understood.

Assumption 3: The Dispositif and the Structuring Force of Practices

“Securitisation occurs in a field of struggles. It thus consists of practices which instantiate intersubjective understandings and which are framed by tools and the habits inherited from different social fields. The dispositif connects different practices.” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 15)
The dispositif⁸ assumption of the PS predominantly relates to practices which are termed as the instrumental tools for securitisation purposes. For securitisation, these instrumental tools are most often policy tools. When discourses are blurred, and the distinction between the audience and securitising actors is vague, the manifestation of securitisation is best understood by the policy tools. The functions of this policy are used by the securitising actor or other agents to cope with security issues and existential threats.

The PS does not necessarily reduce the analysis of policy tools to their technical functions. The instrumental tools are instead regarded as elements that contribute to the emergence of securitisation and activate a dispositif through the routinisation of practices (Balzacq, 2011, pp. 15-16). Policy tools are put into place or were in place in advance because they rest upon some background knowledge of specific threats and how these threats should be confronted. The security tools embody security practices (Ibid.).

Security tools which are institutionally set into place reveal a particular perception of the threat, as well as the policy preferences and the direction of action which is meant to follow. A focus on solely the operational aspects of the security tools is too narrow because security tools also encompass political and symbolic elements (Balzacq, 2011). The selection of the security tools is fundamentally political because their effects require on political mobilisation and other political factors. Why specific policy tools are selected, and how they operate and consequentially evolve is not solely dependent upon their technical attributes. The political nature of policy tools also gives them a symbolic status, in which the collective perception of the problem is built-in.

2.2.2 Definition of Securitisation

These three assumptions which the Paris School extends from the CS, improve the analytic approach to securitisation studies. The assumptions are not designed to find strict causality on why securitisation occurs, but are meant to demonstrate the congruence between the assumptions. Therefore, these assumptions help to understand how securitisation occurs. The Paris School of Securitisation thus aids to answer how the SAR activities are affected by securitisation, because the degree of congruity enables the determination of relative status between the forces. Due to the general consideration of power struggles, the approach of the Paris School of Securitisation is applied to the SAR activities during the Mediterranean Migration Crisis.

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⁸ The term ‘dispositif’ was termed by Foucault in 1977 and loosely translated means ‘apparatus’. It refers to the various physical, administrative, regulatory, discursive, institutional etc. etc. mechanisms and structures which are linked in a system of relations for the exercise of power within society.
An analysis which adheres to deterministic causation, or even probabilistic causation, does not fit the Mediterranean crisis. The Mediterranean crisis deals with a multitude of forces which need to be accounted for, and therefore, it would be difficult to identify a direct causal link for securitisation. More credible results are attained when the network of causality is analysed by investigating the congruence in the respective network, because it takes into account the “strategies of the securitizing actor, the frame of reference of the audience, the immediate context, and the work of the dispositif” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 18). Securitisation cannot be studied through a priori universal principles because security issues are often case-specific. The investigation into the degree of congruence can teach us what likely outcomes of securitisation processes are.

On the basis of these three assumptions by the Paris School, securitisation itself is henceforth defined as “an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actors’ reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be undertaken immediately to block its development” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 3).
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS: APPLYING SECURITISATION THEORY

This chapter examines the methodological import of the three assumptions forwarded by the Paris School of Securitisation. Hereby it draws specific attention to how units and levels of analysis are sorted out, and how the methods chosen for this analysis are operationalised. It also elaborates on why the European Union as an institution is assumed to be the securitising actor. Moreover, it discusses how the data for this research is gathered and how to make sense of this data for the analysis.

3.1 CASE STUDY DESIGN

Two fundamental, interdependent layers are present in securitisation analysis (Balzacq, 2011). Before all else, the puzzle named ‘threat’ should be identified. Consequently, it should be determined how to make sense of this puzzle. Two criteria, which each need to be sufficiently met, are of operational salience in order to identify the puzzle. First, the issue should receive public attention or debate. Second, it is a target for legal or political actions and activities related to public opinion (Ibid.). For the case of the Mediterranean migration crisis, both criteria are independently sufficiently met. Therefore, for the sake of this analysis, it is assumed that securitisation has occurred and the Mediterranean migration crisis is identified as a threat.

It should be noted that differentiating perspectives, especially in the public debate, persist on whether or not migration can be substituted under the category of ‘threats’. Some claim that it is an unjust and racist narrative to argue that people of non-European descent, who flee from violence, are threatening. However, this thesis assumes that, precisely because of the reason that these opinions are an active and loud voice of the public debate, the migration situation at the Mediterranean frontier can be constituted as a security issue according to the securitisation criteria. This thesis does not claim that migration and migrants are a threat, but claims they have been portrayed as such. The current debate on the rights or wrongs of this portrayal is necessary for this case to argue for a level of securitisation.

Moreover, framing the situation as a crisis immediately calls for the need for measures of urgency and emergency to be taken. Few other words that declare ‘insecurity’ as much than the word ‘crisis’ does. Necessary and sufficient conditions for securitisation are constituted if the shared critical salience of the security issue is highlighted by the imperative of acting now (Balzacq, 2011, p. 32). Regardless of which side of the debate people are on – on the humanitarian side or the protectionist
side—both constitute an imperative of acting now and therefore shared critical salience is present within the public debate on migration.

The central premise of the analysis is to examine how the securitisation has evolved and developed into and within the domain of SAR operations. A domain which initially was dealt with within a predominantly humanitarian realm. Although the EU is regarded as the main securitising actor, it should be stated that the analysis does not wonder if the EU securitised SAR activities. The securitisation is there, partly because of the reason that the Mediterranean migration situation was immediately termed as a crisis by the EU. “It is in the idea of criticality [...] that the essence of securitisation primarily lies” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 32). Hence, the research question is formulated as ‘how has securitisation affected SAR’, instead of ‘how has SAR been securitised’. The interest of this analysis thus lies with the process of how SAR activities evolved in terms of securitising moves. This distinction has to be made for clarifying purposes before elaborating further upon the case study design.

In order to analyse the process of securitisation, the SAR operations deployed by the EU are reviewed as one case study, instead of three separate case studies. This thesis does so because it does not aim to compare these three operations. Instead, it aims to illustrate how the EU applies and legitimises securitising moves within a changing context of the Mediterranean migration crisis in general. By viewing the SAR operations as a linear process of policy decisions, periodically overlapping in time, it allows for a comprehensive investigation into how elements of the previous context are altered into a new situation with heightened security.

A case study is defined as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (Gerring, 2004, p. 342). Hereby a unit is understood as a spatially bounded phenomenon, observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period. The SAR operations connote the phenomenon over some time. The operations are studied for the purpose of understanding the process of securitisation within the larger class of other migration practices. The elements of securitisation are brought into sharper focus by constituting the main quandaries for this case study as a qualitative explanatory in-depth single case study.

3.2 THE EU AS A SECURITIZING ACTOR

This thesis identifies the EU as the securitising actor for the SAR activities, simply because it is the institution that deploys the SAR Operations, which are examined throughout the scope of this thesis.

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9 Framing the sides between ‘humanitarian’ and ‘protectionist’ perspectives vis-à-vis is a bit simple and clear-cut. What is roughly meant by the humanitarian perspective are those who believe ‘all refugees welcome’, and by the protectionist perspective those who believe ‘full = full’ and borders should be closed. This stereotypical sketch is made to illustrate the extreme sides of the debate, although in reality many more nuances exist.
Hereby, the EU is meant as an actor as the institution in a general sense. The reason for identifying the EU as the institution is because the Operations Mare Nostrum, Triton, and EUNAVFOR MED Sophia are conducted by different actors within the general ‘EU as an institution’ and belong to different EU policy areas.

Operation Mare Nostrum actually falls outside the competences of the EU, as it was a military mission under the surveillance of the Italian Navy. The choice for the incorporation of Mare Nostrum and its linkage to the EU as the securitising actor is based upon the initiating role the Operation played for SAR activities within a greater European context. Furthermore, the Italian Navy was backed by the EU in its deployment of the operation.

Operation Triton falls under the scope of civilian border policy missions of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard. Frontex missions pertain to the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) policy area. Important to mention is that, within JHA, Council decisions\textsuperscript{10} are based upon qualified majority voting (QMV), implying that for decisions to be passed, 16 out of the current 28 MSs which together represent at least 65 per cent of the total EU population need to vote in favour (European Union, N.D.).

Operation EUNAVFOR MED Sophia is, by contrast, a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDSP) military operation. For decisions to be taken for operation Sophia, Council unanimity is required following the intergovernmental method; this implies that all EU MSs need to agree when meeting within the Council\textsuperscript{11} before a proposal can be adopted. The European Council often plays a vital role, but the intergovernmental method implies that the legislations are not binding EU measures and the Member States not to need to introduce or amend their national legislation following the new EU legislation.

3.3 LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

For an elaboration on the units and levels of analysis, it is necessary to return to some of the theoretical implications of the Copenhagen School and the Paris School of securitisation. The CS identifies three units of analysis (Buzan, Waever, & De Wilde, 1998, p. 36):

1. Referent objects: the thing(s) or person(s) who is existentially threatened.

\textsuperscript{10} The Council refers to the Council of the EU, and should not be confused with the European Council or the Council of Europe, which is not an EU body. The Council sets the strategic direction of the Union, develops the EU’s foreign and security policy, coordinates the policies of EU Member States, and negotiates and adopts EU Laws, together with the European Parliament, after the European Commission proposes new or adapted legislation. (European Union, N.D.).

\textsuperscript{11} The European Council is comprised out of the heads of state or governments of the EU Member States and often meet during summits.
2. **Securitising actors:** the actors who securitise an issue by stating that the referent object is existentially threatened by the particular issue.

3. **Functional actors:** other relevant actors who affect the dynamics in the field of security and who significantly influence decisions in the domain of the securitised issue.

According to the Paris School, the identification of these three units of analysis falls short because they do not account for the elements of audience and context (Balzacq, 2011). Moreover, when closely examining the three units of analysis, it is striking that they actually fall within one level of analysis, namely the level of the agent. All three units carry a degree of agency.

In order to clarify the distinction between the units and levels of analysis with regards to securitisation studies, Balzacq (2011) proposes an alternative framework under the forwarded assumptions of the PS. The theoretical implications for studying the construction of security problems include *agents, acts, and context* as the three *levels of analysis*. The study of securitisation increases in sturdiness with Balzacq’s approach, because by distinguishing these three levels, the blurriness between securitisation elements as discussed in the criticism in the CS, is controlled better.

Whether one can account for all three levels, is case-specific. It is a possibility that one level is hardly present while another level is upfront in its presence. However, this is not a negative issue per se. These levels, as derived from the PS, also aim to understand the *network of causality* between the three assumptions as discussed. Such a network of causality inherently implies that one level could be stronger present than another (Balzacq, 2011). If this is the case, it gives the opportunity to examine *why* one level is more influential and why another is neglected (Ibid.).

Securitisation is thus emphasised through the dynamics of agents, acts and context. Balzacq states that (one of) these elements cannot be *a priori* ignored when the PS approach is adhered to. “[How] the context empowers or disempowers securitising actors; specific non-discursive approach practices (e.g., tools) which provoke securitisation; some heuristic artefacts which induce the audience the built some image of a problem” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 35). The (partly) avoidance of one level of analysis should therefore not be done *a priori*; however, the empirical results could not or hardly account for one. The PS hence requires the inclusion of these three levels of analysis, together with their units of analysis, in order to examine the network of causality during securitisation processes. The vocabulary for the levels and units of analysis is as follows:

*Level 1: Agents.* “This level concentrates on the actors and the relations that structure the situation under scrutiny” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 35). Within the agents level of analysis, four constituent analytics exist. These are: 1) those who contribute or resist, either directly or by proxy, to the design or emergence of security issues (securitizing actors, audiences, and ‘functional actors’; 2) the power
positions (or rather relations) of actor identified under (1); 3) the personal identities and social identity, which operate to both constrain and enable the behaviour of the actors identified under (1); 4) the referent object and the referent subject, or what is threatened and what threatens.” (Ibid., p. 35-36).

**Level 2: Acts.** “This level is interested in practices, both discursive and non-discursive, which underwrite the processes of securitisation being studied.” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 36). The acts level of analysis can be subdivided into four units of analysis, which all denote sure ‘sides’ of acts at root: “1) the ‘action-type’ side that refers to the appropriate language to uses in order to perform a given act – the grammatical and syntactical rules of the language; 2) the strategic side [that refers to] which heuristic artefacts a securitizing actor uses to create (or effectively resonate with) the circumstances that will facilitate the mobilisation of the audience – analogies, metaphors, metonymies, emotions, stereotypes, storylines, frames, electronic or print media, etcetera; 3) the dispositif side of securitisation – the constellation of practices and tools for instance; and 4) the policies generated by securitisation.” (Ibid., p. 36).

**Level 3: Context.** Securitisation is often studied through its discourse, and “discourse does not occur nor operate in a vacuum. It is contextually enabled and constrained” (Balzacq, 2005, p. 36). Threats arise out of specific contexts, and therefore, the discourses need to be situated both historically and socially. Examples of these are respective modes of production, class structure, and political formation. Nonetheless, context is challenging to unpack at first sight. Hence, a distinction is made between distal and proximate contexts as separate units of analysis in order to make the analysis more tractable (Wetherell, 2001, p. 380f). “1) The proximate context includes ‘the sort of occasion or genre of interaction that participants take an episode to be [for instance a meeting or another likewise setting]; and 2) The distal context focuses, [on contrast], on the socio-cultural embeddedness of the text. The distal context has strong recursive effects, meaning that persuasive arguments operate in a cascade [for instance, arguments travel among groups of friends]. It refers to ‘things like social class, the ethnic composition of the participants, the institutions or sites where discourse occurs, ecological, regional, and cultural’ environments” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 37).
The vocabulary for securitisation offers considerable scope for choice with regards to the analysis of securitisation processes. It aims to help to steer the academic attention to focus on the level of analysis, which is most useful to answer a particular research question. Nonetheless, such focus should not mean that the other levels of analysis are neglected. However, this extensive vocabulary does particular constraint research at hand in the sense that embracing all levels of analysis is difficult due to the attached units of analysis. Combining all three levels of analysis and their respective units of analysis in respective research is, therefore, an extensive and challenging undertaking.

In order to capture the securitisation process better, Balzacq (2011) embraces the entire vocabulary into a scheme ‘securitisation analysis in context’\(^\text{12}\). The translation of the vocabulary into such a scheme enables a better understanding and thus comprehensive analysis of securitisation. Furthermore, it lifts securitisation studies above the concept of a textualist model of speech act, in particular, when doing discourse analysis (Ibid.). The scheme is divided along two axes: the vertical axis accounts for the functional and ontological terms of securitisation analysis; and the horizontal axis for the pragmatics\(^\text{13}\) and semiotics\(^\text{14}\) terms.

\(\text{Table 3.1. The vocabulary of securitisation analysis (Balzacq 2011, p. 36).}\)

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<th>Levels</th>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Act</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• Securitizing actor, audience, functional actor</td>
<td>• Action-type</td>
<td>• Distal</td>
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<td>• Power positions/relations</td>
<td>• Heuristic artefacts</td>
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<td>• Personal and social identities</td>
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<td>• Referent object and referent subject</td>
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\(\text{12 See figure 3.2}\)
\(\text{13 Pragmatics is the study of the use of natural language in communication and the relations between languages and their participants or users. It deals with how both literal and nonliteral aspects of meaning are determined by principles that refer to the physical or social context. (Encyclopedia Britannica).}\)
\(\text{14 Semiotics is the study of signs and sign-using behavior, such as icons, symbols, and subjective meanings. The ‘language’ system of securitisation. (Encyclopedia Britannica).}\)
It should be noted that these axes are rough guidelines, instead of apparent set dichotomies. Securitisation studies are often very case-specific, hence overlap between the axes is possible. The boxes identify the factors which are involved in categorising existential threats. In order to capture a credible study of securitisation, the scope of inquiry should not be confined to one of the four boxes or a single intersection between the boxes. A credible study requires an account of the ‘what’, the ‘who’, and the ‘how’. These three dimensions are at root embedded in the overarching context, which, in turn, provides information on the ‘when’ and the ‘where’. If these dimensions are captured in analysis, the political structuring of an existential threat can be understood.

3.4 **Methodological Techniques**

The security problem(s) of the Mediterranean migration crisis knows many nuances in how the threat of insecurity is designed and how the crisis evolved. In order to capture these nuances, this study employs a combination of process-tracing and discourse analysis because they are mutually supportive. Process-tracing in the form of a sequential analysis (Mahoney, Process Tracing and Historical Explanation, 2015) is best suited to trace the EU’s SAR developments. Discourse analysis, the dominant method for securitisation analysis, is subsequently used to analyse how the EU’s SAR narratives have been affected by securitisation.

3.4.1 **Process-Tracing**

Process-tracing is a set of procedures for formulating and testing explanations in order to make causal inferences about case studies (Bennett, 2008). The method is often employed by analysts who are
commonly interested in the generic question, “what Xs caused Y in case Z?” (Mahoney, 2015, p. 201). The X is the independent variable and the Y the dependent variable.

The causal explanations can be subcategorised into two basic process-tracing tasks (Mahoney, 2015). One the one hand, it enables the identification of the possible Xs that could have caused Y in case Z. For example, what are the possible causes that have led to the Mediterranean migration crisis? On the other hand, process-tracing allows for the testing whether a particular X was a cause of Y in case Z. For example, was the Arab spring of 2011 a cause of the Mediterranean migration crisis?

Due to its commitment to causal explanation, it might not seem like a correct fit at first for securitisation analysis (Balzacq, 2011). Securitisation seems to fall into the domaine réservé of interpretative epistemology at first sight, while process-tracing and its uncovering of causal mechanisms resonate more with a positivist epistemology (Ibid). Nonetheless, the focus on the causal mechanisms at root could be a useful method for examining specific processes of securitisation. A process is by nature a simple ‘these Xs caused Y in case Z’ formula, and therefore a securitisation process could follow this formula as well.

The method of process-tracing is often used through the engagement of a detailed narrative, through the use of hypotheses and generalisation, historical explanations, or sequential analysis (Mahoney, 2015; George & Bennett, 2005). The latter form of process-tracing, sequential analysis, is best applicable to the scope of this thesis. Through the method of sequential analysis, the researcher wants to trace the “sequence of events that brought securitisation about [by converting] historical narrative into a rational causal explanation couched in explicit theoretical forms (George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 210-211).

Sequential analysis typically follows the pattern of historically explaining “an outcome by appealing to events that unfold over time and by referring to sequences of linked causal factors” (Mahoney, 2015, p. 204). In order to capture such an analysis, critical junctures are often identified when individual decisions or events occurred that pushed long-run trajectories of change (Mahoney, 2015; Berins Collier & Collier, 1991; Capoccia & Keleman, 2007; Soifer, 2012). Furthermore, it allows focussing on path-dependent processes of change (Mahoney, 2000; Pierson, 2004).

Process-tracing is one of the least travelled routes for securitisation analysis but has the possibility of yielding results when analysing the process of securitisation. Moreover, when applying process-tracing to securitisation analysis, the aim is to look for causal adequacy instead of causal determinacy (Balzacq, 2011, pp. 47-49). Causal adequacy allows for examination of the degree of congruence between the different circumstances that drive or constrain securitisation. The identification of a precise causal link might prove difficult for securitisation analysis (Ibid.). Therefore,
“investigation of the congruence between, for instance, the strategies of the securitising actor, the frame of reference of the audience, and the immediate context, may yield more credible results” (Ibid., p. 49).

Process-tracing lays bare the conditions and strategies of securitisation processes in order to discover “conditions that produce a previously unobtainable result” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 49; Mahoney, 2015). However, the method of process-tracing, in combination with securitisation analysis is still in its growing phase. In order to succumb any research bias, this thesis combines process-tracing with the method of discourse analysis, which is predominantly used in securitisation analysis. Whereas process-tracing tends to ask the ‘Why?’ – why did a phenomenon evolve the way it did – discourse analysts instead ask ‘How?’ – has a phenomenon happened and how has it taken shape.

3.4.2 Discourse Analysis

While process-tracing aids to answer why the SAR operations have evolved and securitised the way they did, discourse analysis helps to understand how this evolvement was shaped through relevant discourses and practices. Per the core assumptions of the Paris School, the discourse analysis employed throughout this thesis focusses on resources and practices of securitisation; this allows us to analyse whether or not securitising moves on the issue of SAR operations have been accepted by identifying new or altered discourses by the hands of European decision-makers. Discourse analysis for securitisation analysis helps to “map the emergence and evolution of patterns of representations which are constitutive of a threat image [by establishing] the meaning of texts shaped by distinct contexts” (Balzacq, 2011, pp. 39-40).

Hence, discourse analysis is a suitable means to capture in-depth the hints of securitisation that the process-tracing method brought to the surface. It enables us to delve into the presumed securitising move and examine how the securitisation is formulated and argued for, based on resources and practices such as press speeches and official EU documents. These linguistic elements are still an essential aspect of securitisation analysis because they demonstrate how storylines are framed to resonate with the audience. “Discourse is an instrument of power, of increasing importance in contemporary societies. The way this instrument of power works is often hard to understand, and [...] discourse analysis aims to make it more visible and transparent” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 25).

Discourse analysts make a distinction between causal and teleological approaches in order to be critically salient. Teleological explanations proceed on a different object of reference, for instance; “X occurred in order that Y should happen” or “Y is what X was for”. Causal explanations follow the logic of “Y occurred because X happened” or “X is what produced Y”. The teleological approach is often used as a backward analysis of the inferential link between spoken intentions and planned actions.
(Balzacq, 2011, p. 23). For example, it answers a question like “what was the statement of the EU for?”. For discourse analysis, this implies that “if we want to consider what is done in saying (illlocutionary act), we need to give credit to the effects of that specific action or what is done by saying (perlocutionary effects)” (Ibid., p. 24).

The premise of securitisation theory is to capture how problematic social phenomena become security issues. Discourse analysis thus needs to be tailored “to the task of uncovering the structures and practices that produced the threat image whose source, mechanisms, and effects we want to explicate” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 40). For securitisation analysis, its adaptation has affinities with Foucault’s argument on “how discourses actively structure the social space within which actors act, through the constitution of concepts, objects, and subject positions” (Philips & Hardy, 2002, p. 25; Balzacq, 2011). Thereby, a thick description is offered of the resources and practices that are associated with the evolution of security problems.

3.5 Data Collection

The step of selecting and collecting data is crucial in the process of conceptualising the development of the research. The empirical materials for this thesis are compromised out of primary and secondary literature, which are derived from a wide range of sources. First, this analysis relies heavily on public EU documents in which the Union sets out its SAR strategies. The key documents for this thesis are press releases, official statements, speeches by Commissioners or the President of the Council of the EU, and official EU legislation such as regulations. Because the scope of the EU as the securitising actor is dependent on which SAR Operation is discussed, the public press and document repositories of the agents of the SAR operations provide most of the relevant data.

The primary documents are gathered from the European Commission Press Release Database, Frontex’s News Releases Database, the database of press releases and statements of the European Council and the Council of the EU, the Press release Archives for Operation Sophia provided by the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the EUR-Lex Database which grants access to EU law. The search for relevant documents within these databases was controlled with the period of 5 years. Seeking for documents outside of this controlled period of 2014-2019 is therefore unnecessary.

Furthermore, the search words used in these databases included ‘search and rescue’, ‘saving lives’, ‘border management’, ‘irregular migration’, ‘border control’, ‘loss at sea’, ‘presence at sea’, ‘fighting smugglers’, ‘fighting traffickers’, ‘humanitarian responsibility’, ‘surveillance’, ‘strengthening borders’, and ‘external border’. It is also important to note that many official documents refer to each other, which facilitates the search for other relevant text. As a result, the primary data collection
counts for 26 documents as listed in Appendix A. A limited amount of primary sources is available for 2017 and 2018. An explanation for this could be the discontinuement of Frontex Joint Operation Triton, and the transitional blockage EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia was facing between its operational phases. It might also be related to the peak of the Mediterranean migration crisis having ended, and as a result the decisionmaking process on the operations could have been slower.

The investigation of only EU documents has some limitations in the sense that these documents could be controlled in their language. To counter any bias arising from too controlled texts, the primary data is triangulated by collecting secondary data. The secondary data includes, among others, newspapers reports, secondary legislation, possible available interviews with relevant agents, parliamentary inquiries or hearings relevant to the subject under investigation, and academic articles of scholars with different disciplines. Additionally, statistics gathered by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) are used to contribute the data on the SAR operations and the Mediterranean Migration crisis.

3.6 **Data Analysis**

In order to make sense of the data gathered, an explanation is required on how the data is analysed. The data needs to be conceptualised and categorised before examining the securitising manifestation within the data. While studying the different sources, several crucial concepts were identified. Through the identification of these search words within the documents gathered, a first glance enables weighing and comparing the differences in strategic discourses mentioned on an exploratory basis. These initial insights of the data assisted in structuring the thesis. Moreover, these insights served as an initial evaluation of the research process and research questions. The secondary sources of literature on the subject of search and rescue and EU border management offered inspiration and critical insights into how to connect the primary sources.

This thesis primarily investigates official EU documents in the form of speeches, press releases, statements, and regulations. The wording and language used within these documents first need to be checked for internal coherence; *intratextuality* (Balzacq, 2011, p. 43). Intratextuality enables the examination of actualised sets of specific statements uttered, meaning that the performative dimensions of the text are enquired into. In order to test the intratextuality of a document, some linguistic, semiotic, and pragmatic elements should be kept in the back of the mind.

First, it needs to be asserted what kind of action a document wants to achieve; is the text meant to be assertive, commissive, expressive, directive, or declarative (Ibid.). Perhaps certain

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15 These words are listed on p. 32-33.
representations are created by the kind of action a text adheres to. Such representations also give hints to the communicative purposes of the text, as well as its relevance. Second, any heuristic artefacts that present ‘the map of world politics’ should be identified. Heuristic artefacts include metaphors, pictures, emotions, analogies, etcetera (Ibid.). Third, it needs to be questioned if the text generates specific interactions.

In order to emphasise the relationships among these kinds of texts, it is also necessary to investigate their intertextuality (Balzacq, 2011, p. 43). Intertextuality refers to the interconnection between the documents and helps to investigate if the meaning of a text is shaped by another text. Hence, considering the intertextuality enables the inquiry into the generative power of the documents. Intertextuality allows for capturing specific patterns of representations within a text and understanding these patterns of representations between texts. Therefore, “the meaning as the result of the interplay between bodies of texts” can be clarified (Ibid., p. 43).

Understanding the intertextuality between documents is fundamental for the study of securitisation. Securitisation is a process, and therefore, the breadth and depth of securitisation can only be captured if various genres of texts are examined. Preferably, these texts were produced at different points in time and distinct social contexts (Neumann, 2008, p. 71). By the examination of documents produced by the European Commission, the Council, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex, the official legislative documents over five years from 2014 until 2019, I aim to capture the securitisation of SAR Operations.

Conducive to the combination of considering both intratextuality and intertextuality, the process and discourses of securitisation are connected. Such a connection constitutes eventually to a storyline as Haijer (1995) defines them; “generative narratives that allow actors to draw upon various discursive categories to give meaning to specific physical or social phenomena” (Haijer, 1995, p. 56). A storyline then holds three functions: “First, it establishes a link among signifying characteristics that point toward the threatening phenomenon; Second, when reified, a storyline acquires its momentum by contributing to a cognitive routinisation; Third, storylines create contending coalitions around contrasting sets of common understanding” (Balzacq, 2011, p. 43).

Therefore, the storyline connects the patterns of representations visible throughout several texts from different points in time, in different social contexts, to give these texts their overall coherence. It helps to identify the variations in and between texts, from one setting to another.
4 Historical Context: Illustrating The Migratory Routes

The maritime refugee crisis in Europe is one of historic proportions, and it is becoming one of the continent’s defining challenges of the early 21st century. Nonetheless, despite the significant media attention it has garnered, the Mediterranean migrant crisis constitutes a relatively small part of the global picture on people on the move (UNHCR, 2015). Therefore, the Mediterranean crisis ought to be placed within the broader context of a worldwide rise in forced displacement, including a sharp increase of those seeking safety across the sea. From 2013 to 2014, statistics have shown the most significant annual increase ever worldwide in people who were forcibly displaced, as a result of persecution, conflict and human rights violations (UNHCR, 2014).

This chapter introduces the historical and social context with regards to the Mediterranean migrant crisis. While the peak of the migrant crisis is generally considered to be 2015 the period before and after the peak is also discussed to include an extensive overview of the situation in the Mediterranean Sea; this allows for identification and discussion of changes over time. By delineating the crisis into the three most used migratory routes, the events and decisions surrounding the Mediterranean crisis are separated into accessible components to examine. The goal of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive and thorough synopsis of the Mediterranean migrant crisis. In order to do so, this chapter describes and explain how several Mediterranean migration routes came into being while taking into account relevant factors such as its respective ‘popularity’, decision-making processes and results, etcetera. As a result, a ‘map of the world’, following the securitisation scheme, is offered16.

4.1 The Eastern Mediterranean Route

The Eastern Mediterranean Route refers to the sea crossing from Turkey to Greece. This route peaked in 2015 when refugees seeking shelter from conflict areas such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan arrived in high numbers to Europe (EU Consilium, 2018). The vast majority of migrants in 2015 were headed towards Europe via this itinerary, namely 84 per cent (Crawley & et al., 2016a). The media was now dominated by the stories and images of thousands of people arriving in Greece and its islands. The influx of migrants through the Eastern Mediterranean route was relatively sudden, with a distinct doubling of arrivals per month during the ‘high season of migration’17.

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16 See figure 3.2
17 See figure 4.1
Although media coverage and politics often display the movement of migrants as a linear, singular uninterrupted flow of people heading towards Europe, this is somewhat misleading (Crawley & et al., 2016a). The focus on the migration movement into Europe conceals the ‘mass movement’ of migratory routes in other continents. Worldwide, 70.8 million people are forcibly displaced, of which 80 per cent are located in countries neighbouring their countries of origin (UNCHR, 2019). Moreover, many of those seeking safety might not intend to travel to Europe initially but were often be forced due to secondary factors (McMahon & Sigona, 2018). These factors include lack of fundamental human rights, ethnic discrimination, sexual and violent harassment, limited access to health, employment, and education, etcetera (UNCHR, 2019).

Significant diversity exists between individual trajectories of those fleeing their country of origin, in terms of the number of countries traversed and the time spent in foreign countries. However, three principal routes can be identified which converged in Turkey and thus contributed to the significant increase: 1) The neighbourhood route, from Syria and Iraq into the southern border of Turkey; 2) The Middle Eastern regional route, from Afghanistan and sometimes Pakistan through Iran into Eastern Turkey; and 3) a MENA route from Sudan, Egypt, Somalia, Morocco, Tunisia, and the Gulf countries into Turkey (Crawley & et al., 2016b, p. 23).

Meanwhile, during the height of popularity for this trajectory, the EU has sought to halt the migratory flows via the Eastern Mediterranean route in order to minimise the political crisis arising from the increased migration movements. To reduce the number of irregular arrivals in Greece, the EU has pursued close cooperation with Turkey. Cooperation was finalised through the implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement of March 2016. This deal ultimately led to a 77 per cent drop of arrivals in 2017 compared to 2016 via the Eastern Mediterranean Route. Conjointly, the deal is credited with significantly reducing the number of lives lost at sea as well as tackling migrant smugglers (EU Consilium, 2018). However, the deal does imply that many of those seeking refuge are kept stuck in Turkey or other neighbouring countries.
The EU-Turkey deal constituted an agreement from Turkey to “accept the rapid return of all migrants not in need of international protection crossing from Turkey into Greece and to take back all irregular migrants intercepted in Turkish waters” (PRES/144/16). Additionally, “for every Syrian being returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU. [...]. Priority will be given to migrants who have not previously entered or tried to enter the EU irregularly” (Ibid.). Furthermore, the EU agreed to “further speed up the disbursement of the initially allocated 3 billion euros under the Facility of Refugees in Turkey and ensure funding of further projects for persons under temporary protection identified with swift input from Turkey. [...]. Once these resources are about to be used to the full and provided the above commitments are met, the EU will mobilise additional funding of a [extra] 3 billion euro” (Ibid.).

4.2 THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

The Central Mediterranean migration corridor is the route from Northern Africa, mainly constituting Libya as the departure country, to Italy. While migration across the Mediterranean via this trajectory is not a new phenomenon, it has become to most-used route to irregularly\(^\text{18}\) enter Europe in recent years. The highest recorded number of migrants detected on the Central Mediterranean Route was 181,376 people in 2016 (FRONTEX, n.d.). When the sea journey reached Italian shores, asylum seekers were bound to enter into a complex, multi-layered reception system (McMahon & Sigona, 2016). Moreover, the Italian asylum procedure was slow and overstressed due to the rapid increase in arrivals.

To manage the high numbers of incoming migrants countries like Italy are receiving, the Commission rolled out the ‘hotspot approach’ in May 2015 (Majcher, 2018). The hotspot approach assists frontline EU MSs that face disproportionate migratory pressure at their external borders. It is meant to ensure that all migrants are registered and are accordingly assigned to their relevant procedure: asylum, return, or relocation (Ibid.). Furthermore, it also intended to ‘Europeanise’ the Mediterranean crisis by lifting the burden of Italian shoulders through the relocation programme, as well as providing other resources and support to Italy (McMahon & Sigona, 2016).

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\(^{18}\) Irregular migration is defined as the “movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination.” (IOM, Key Migration Terms, N.D.).
Figure 4.2: Asylum application outcomes in Italy in 2015 (McMahon & Sigona, 2016, p. 15).

However, where do the arrivals come from who travel via the Central Mediterranean Route? What are the migratory routes previous to crossing the Central Mediterranean? Yes, the vast majority took a boat from Libya, but the migratory legs before reaching Libya are incredibly varied. Four principal routes which converged in Libya before embarking on the sea journey to Europe can be identified: 1) the North African route, originating in Morocco, Tunisia, Libya or Egypt; 2) the West African route, originating in diverse countries in West and Central Africa; 3) an East African route, originating in the Horn of Africa, often via Ethiopia or Sudan; and 4) alternative routes from wherever in the world, originating in countries beyond the African continent, yet transiting through Africa via air travel (Crawley & et al., 2016b, p. 24).

Most of the migrants thus use Libya as a transit country, which has encouraged the development of smuggling and trafficking networks in Libya (EU Consilium, 2019). Furthermore, the political situation in Libya has been extremely worrisome since the re-escalation of the conflict since 2014. Libya is momentarily excessively hostile to migrants that they board on boats for Europe because they believe there is no other way of escaping the horrors in Libya (McMahon & Sigona, 2016). This element is called ‘forced migration’ because the horrors of (extreme) violence which a vast majority of migrants endure in Libya: death threats, religious persecution, exploitation, experiences of being kidnapped, arbitrarily arrested, enslaved, held up at gunpoint, physical violence, extreme hunger, sexual violence and rape (Ibid.).

It is important to mention the dangers many migrants face in Libya because it sets the stage as to why they embark on the dangerous sea journey via the Central Mediterranean. Both the Eastern and the Western Mediterranean route are shorter in distance, yet people who embark on the sea journey via Libya are so desperate to leave the escalated situation – In Libya itself, they appear willing to take the higher risks via the Central Mediterranean route. This particular trajectory via sea is
considered to be the only way out of hostile Libya, resulting in the continuous high numbers of refugees crossing the Central Mediterranean.

4.3 **THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE**

The Western Mediterranean route stretches across the sea from Morocco to Spain and has significantly increased in the number of detected irregular migrants in recent years (FRONTEX, n.d.). In 2018, the number of detections doubled, as it became the most frequently used route. However, these numbers still do not account in the slightest for the numbers of detected migrants using the Eastern or the Central Mediterranean route. For 2018, its record high was 57,034, as opposed to 23,063 detected migrants during 2017 (Ibid.). Although recent media coverage has claimed a shift from the Central route to the Western Mediterranean route, this shift in numbers seems to be quite debatable.

While Morocco often is the main departure country for Europe via this trajectory, most of the migrants registered were linked to originating from sub-Saharan countries. Remarkable, however, is the increase of Moroccan migrants since the end of 2018, as Morocco is considered to be a safe country. Today, Moroccans are the top detected nationality, followed by Guineans, Malians, Algerians, and other migrants from the Maghreb region (Ibid.). The amount of detected Moroccan migrants amongst the arrivals in Spain could indicate that Morocco, as the embarkation country, has relaxed its control on migratory outflows. Other media outlets also suggest that Morocco has political bargain reasons to relax its migration control in order to extort concessions from the EU by placing Spain under pressure due to the increased migration (Der Spiegel, 2018; Euronews, 2018).

![Refugee and migrant routes to Europe](image)

*Figure 4.3: Refugee and migrant routes to Europe (n=122). (Crawley & et al., 2016b, p. 22)*
More recent attention has focused on the provision of Search and Rescue activities during the Mediterranean migrant crisis. This shift of focus is the accumulated result of events that ultimately led to the current circumstances of SAR activities. This chapter studies the SAR operations that are deployed by the EU. It examines the process of how one operation led up to another. While these are three separate operations under different names and with different mandates, they cannot be seen independently of each other. Depending on how the Mediterranean migration crisis developed, the EU needed other resources, instruments, and mandates to meet the particular newly-emerged situation of the crisis. Each time the crisis shifted in its nature, the EU employed different tactics and techniques in its SAR operations.

This chapter analyses the process the EU SAR operations undergo and discuss, throughout this process, and why the EU altered its operational SAR activities at pivotal moments. The three operations, Mare Nostrum, Triton, and Sophia demonstrate the maritime SAR activities during the Mediterranean migration crisis. When compared and demarcated in time and place, the operations demonstrate carefully how each of them has integrated evolved security-based approaches in the course of the Mediterranean crisis. The following sections go into depth about each SAR operation and how they conducted their respective mandates.

**Figure 5.1:** Timeline of irregular migrant and refugee flows to Italy (crossing the Central Mediterranean), 2-11-2016 (EPSC, 2017, p. 2).
5.1 Italian Navy Operation Mare Nostrum

The origin of Operation Mare Nostrum (hereinafter referred to as Mare Nostrum\textsuperscript{19}) can be found at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea in two shipwrecks. After the drowning of more than 600 people near Lampedusa in 2013, Italian authorities declared a national day of mourning and proclaimed honorary Italian citizenship to the dead (Musarò, 2017). The images of dozens of rows of coffins were received with great concern while the call to prevent further drowning scenarios became louder. The Italian Prime Minister, Enrico Letta, decided only days later, on October 18\textsuperscript{th}, to launch a humanitarian navy and coast guard operation on the Mediterranean Sea in Italian territorial waters (Ibid.). Mare Nostrum was set out to sail for a year as an emergency SAR operation and received broad public consensus in Italy (Davies, 2014).

The key objectives of Mare Nostrum were twofold, namely targeted both at rescuing migrants and safeguarding human life at sea, as well as arresting smugglers and human traffickers while halting the illegal entry of unauthorised migrants (Musarò, 2017). Mare Nostrum constituted of both sea and air operations, which were approached as a strictly first-responder type of emergency operations. The Italian government primarily portrayed Mare Nostrum as a means to the emergency rescue in the humanitarian battlefield of the Mediterranean Sea (Scherer & Di Giorgio, 2014).

Remarkable is that, during the launch of Mare Nostrum, the survivors of the Lampedusa shipwrecks were being detained by Italian authorities in a detention camp in Sicily (Musarò, 2017). Moreover, the Sicilian boats and fishers who were able to assist in rescuing migrant during the Lampedusa drowning faced prosecution with charges based on assisting illegal immigration and human trafficking (Ibid.). Nor did Italy report on its renewed visa regime with added mobility restrictions which forced people to take boats in the first place (Ibid.). It was also a transformative moment for Italian communication strategies, as Mare Nostrum personnel began sharing photographs and videos about operations on the high seas, which presented a narrative of rescue and ‘humanitarian soldiers’ in the Mediterranean (Ibid.).

The size of the patrol area of Mare Nostrum consisted of 70,000 square kilometres in the Mediterranean Sea. It encompassed the rescue zones of Italy, as well as Malta, up to 15 miles before the Libyan shorelines (Davies, 2014; EPSC, 2017). It had multiple assets at its disposal, which included more than 900 military personnel, five ships, two submarines, five planes, three drones, and one helicopter, under the command of a flagship that served as the control and command platform (Davies, 2014).

\textsuperscript{19}Mare Nostrum is the Latin wording for ‘Our Sea’. It is worth noting that Mussolini used the Roman name to frame fascist propaganda, because of its possessive suggestion of the Mediterranean Sea by Italy. This seems to imply the Mediterranean as a space of care and control (Musarò, Mare Nostrum: The Visual Politics of a Military-Humanitarian Operation in the Mediterranean Sea, 2017).
2014). Its personnel included a broad range of expertise, such as individuals from the public security department, the border police, as well as the central directorate for immigration. This diversity of staff was, moreover, complemented by having doctors on board associated with the Red Cross, the Italian relief corps, and the Italian health department (Ibid.).

Mare Nostrum enjoyed seemingly broad public support, the migrant death toll decreased significantly and was seen as positively contributing to migration procedures. However, it was politically controversial due to its high costs, namely an estimated 9 million Euros per month (EPSC, 2017). Moreover, Italy was considered a member of the EU that unfairly shouldered the burden for many other MSs who are not situated at the frontline with the Mediterranean Sea (Ibid.). Premier Renzi stressed that the Mediterranean migration crisis is not just an Italian concern because of Italy’s location. Instead, the crisis is an EU concern, and thus, the ‘burden-sharing’ principle was defended by Renzi (Panebianco, 2016). He argued for a common approach to be taken in line with this principle, according to which all MSs must share the burden of increased migration flows.

Due to the high costs and domestic and EU opposition, the Italian-led Operation Mare Nostrum ended one year later from its inception, on 31 October 2014. It was superseded by Frontex-led Joint Operation Triton, in which Italy, however, remained a big player in cooperation with other MSs. Although Mare Nostrum’s mandate was not adopted by the EU, Premier Renzi succeeded in shaping the EU agenda by putting migration in its priorities (Panebianco, 2016). The shift to the new operation was due to Renzi’s persistence when addressing migration issues. The launch of Operation Triton was saluted as a success of the Italian capacity to set the agenda (Carbone, 2015).

5.2 Frontex Joint Operation Triton

After the denouncement of Operation Mare Nostrum, a meeting between the Italian Interior Minister, Angelino Alfano, and the Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malström, led to an announcement on 27 August 2014 that a joint SAR programme was to be established. This would be a programme within the framework of mandates and obligations of Frontex, the European border control agency. Initially, Operation Triton (hereinafter referred to as Triton) would encompass other small-scale border patrol operations in the Mediterranean, namely Hermes and Aeneas, as well as supersede Mare Nostrum. Per 1 November 2014, patrolling activities of Mare Nostrum were taken over as Frontex commenced its coordination of Operation Triton (EPSC, 2017).

The key objectives of Triton were first and foremost within the border patrol mandate it initially carries. Its mandate was to coordinate EU external border patrol activities in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as to provide additional technical equipment and border guards to the EU
MSs which face increased migratory pressure (European Commission, N.D.). By request of Italian authorities, Triton operated closer to Italian shorelines than Mare Nostrum did (EPSC, 2017). Moreover, Triton is a Joint Operation, which implies that border guard authorities and assets from multiple EU MSs are brought together, although the operation is hosted by Italy (European Commission, N.D.).

It is noteworthy that Triton’s mandate did not initially include SAR operations. Primarily during its first nine months of operating, Triton focused more on sea border protection, rather than on SAR (EPSC, 2017). The inclusion of Search and Rescue into Triton’s mandate is relegated to only what is routinely demanded by international maritime obligations (Arsenijevic, Manzi, & Zachariah, N.D.). Hence, Triton does not operate a dedicated and proactive SAR mission within its mandate. Triton is obliged, however, to fulfil EU and international legislation to carry out SAR operations whenever circumstances demanded; this implies that reported or encountered vessels in distress during Triton’s border patrol activities should be rescued, yet it is not obliged to proactively seek out these vessels (EPSC, 2017).

In reality, a step by step example of a SAR operation supported by Triton is structured along the following procedure (European Commission, N.D.): First, Frontex coordinates national border guards who patrol at sea by vessels and aircraft. Second, when a vessel or aircraft detects a boat carrying migrants, the border guards assess whether the migrant boat is in an emergency. The Triton crew transmits all information to the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) and needs to inform the International Coordination Centre (ICC). Third, the MRCC, which constitutes of national maritime centres and in the case of the Mediterranean is often the Italian Coast Guard, coordinates the SAR operation. This can be done in assistance with other vessels which participate in Triton. The ICC keeps the MRCC updates on the position of other Triton-coordinated vessels. Fourth, once the migrants are rescued by Triton vessels, they are taken to the nearest coastline. In most scenarios, this is Italy due to the whereabouts of the operating region of Triton. Fifth, the Italian authorities conduct the immigration process, which consists of fingerprinting and identification. Frontex hereby helps the national authorities by screening migrants as well as gathering information, with permission, about the journey, smugglers, fees, and routes (European Commission, N.D.).

In July 2015, the fleet size and assets of Triton was expanded by threefold due to the peak of the migration crisis with a monthly budget of approximately 2,9 million euros (Davies, 2014). Furthermore, its operation activities were spread southwards to include the Strait of Sicily, up and until 138 nautical miles south of Sicily (EPSC, 2017). Because it is a joint operation, the aircraft, vessels, and personnel are supplied by EU and non-EU countries. The assets at Triton’s disposal include nine Italian
and three Maltese Coast Guard Ships, an additional ten sea vessels provided by France, Germany, Ireland, UK, Iceland and Norway. Triton also knows some air assets by EU countries who support the operation, namely two UK helicopters and one aeroplane from Finland. No information is made available on the number of staff assigned to the joint operation, and if and how the personnel also includes medical and custom officers on board (EPSC, 2017). Moreover, it is noteworthy that the smaller capacity of Triton compared to Mare Nostrum led to a nine-fold increase in deaths at sea after the immediate termination of Mare Nostrum in 2014 (Zamatto & et al., 2017).

In February 2018 Joint Operation Themis (hereinafter referred to as Themis\(^\text{20}\)) was launched to replace Operation Triton, which had been running for four years. Operation Themis continued to assist Italy in border control activities in the Mediterranean and claims to include SAR as a crucial component. Additionally, Themis is stated to focus on an enhanced law enforcement aspect of border control in order to prevent foreign terrorist fighters from entering the EU (Frontex, 2018). Furthermore, Themis responds to the shifts in migratory flows across the Mediterranean Routes while its activities span across the Mediterranean to include both the Eastern as well as the Western Mediterranean Route (Drent, 2018).

Remarkable is that, with the launch of Themis, the former obligation of Triton to bring rescued migrants only to Italy was removed. Within Themis, the decision on disembarkation is decided by the country that coordinates the rescue (Scherer, 2018). This alteration within the mandate can be traced back to the political climate in Italy, and the lack of support by the EU. No precise designation of the country of disembarkation gives, for instance, a strong message to Italy’s Mediterranean neighbours like Malta. Furthermore, due to the high influx of migrants landing on Italian shores in the previous year, the political climate in Italy had altered. Whereas Mare Nostrum was received with broad public support, fuelled by anger and despair of the Lampedusa shipwrecks, Italian politics now faced a populist backlash (Ibid.).

Fabrice Leggeri, Frontex’s executive director, stated that “all participants recognised that Italy is facing extraordinary pressure and needs additional support from the EU and Frontex. […]. Furthermore, Italy has indicated that in case of a massive influx of migrants, it would like to be able to disembark migrants in the ports of other Member States” (Frontex, 2017). The ‘extraordinary pressure’ can be perceived as an indication of why the focus of Themis was placed within the premises of law enforcement and terrorist threats, instead of a more humanitarian narrative. It can be traced to a securitising move in which the mandate of Themis serves in order to protect the internal security of

\(^{20}\) “Triton was a Greek God and the messenger of the sea, while Themis was the Goddess of divine law and order” (Scherer, 2018).
the EU. If Italy’s demands on disembarking migrants in other MSs were to be met, the new operation had to include an increase in surveillance to detect threats at the borders of the Union.

5.3 **EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia**

The Lampedusa shipwrecks were not the only shipwreck that shocked Europe and eventually led to EU operations in the Mediterranean. In April 2015, more than 800 migrants had drowned on their journey from Libya to Europa. Their overcrowded fishing boats had capsized on two independent occasions, on 12 April and 18 April 2015. The latter is even recorded as the deadliest single shipwreck in the Mediterranean. These twin shipwrecks were not even caused by the reluctance to rescue people on migrant boats. The nearby sight of SAR vessels approaching resulted in overt excitement of the fishing boats’ passengers. In the same month, over 1200 lives are believed to be lost at sea in a single week, when a SAR cargo ship collided with a migrants’ vessel after a failed manoeuvre (Death by Rescue, N.D.). These death tolls compelled the EU to take further immediate actions. The heavily mediatised tragedies led to an extraordinary European Council on 23 April 2015 (Drent, 2018).

On 22 June 2015, the EU officially launched a maritime military operation named *European Union Naval Force Mediterranean* (EUNAVFOR Med). This operation was quickly renamed to Operation Sophia (hereinafter referred to as Sophia). Sophia is the name of a baby, born by a Somali mother, who was rescued as part of the EUNAVFOR Med Taskforce (EPSC, 2017). Along with 453 migrants, her mother boarded the German frigate Schleswig-Holstein on which the baby was born and named after Princess Sophia of Schleswig-Holstein. HR/VP Federica Mogherini proposed the name change of EUNAVFOR MED “to honour the lives of the people we are saving, the lives of the people we want to protect” (EPSC, 2017, p. 10; European Commission, 2016).

Sophia was established to “contribute to the wider EU efforts to disrupt the business model of criminal networks in the Central Mediterranean and thus prevent further loss of life at sea” (European Commission, 2016). Her core mandate is to undertake systematic efforts to identify, capture and dispose of vessels or other enabling assets at disposal used, or suspected of being used, by migrant smugglers or human traffickers in the Southern Central Mediterranean (Ibid.). Therefore, it is predominantly an anti-smuggling mission, rather than an explicit SAR mission.

A year later, on 20 June 2016, two supporting tasks were added to Sophia’s mandate by the European Council. These were, one, “the training of Libyan Coastguards and Navy, in order to enhance their capability to disrupt smuggling and trafficking networks in Libya, as well as to perform search and rescue activities to save lives”, and two, “contribution to the information sharing and support the implementation of the UN arms embargo on the High Seas off the coast of Libya, on the basis of UNSCR
Accordingly, Sophia is divided into three sequential phases (Drent, 2018, p. 2). Phase One focused on gathering information and lasted from June 2015 until October 2015. This implied methods of surveillance and assessment of trafficking networks in the Central Mediterranean. Phase Two is then divided into two parts, Alpha and Bravo, and is termed as the ‘active phase’. Part Alpha indicated the boarding, searching, and seizing of vessels that are suspected of being used for human smuggling on the Mediterranean High Seas. Part Bravo was to expand these activities into Libyan territorial waters. Phase Three is the inclusion of action on Libyan territory, meaning the disposal of vessels and other enabling assets to apprehend traffickers and smugglers on Libyan shores (Drent, 2018; Arsenijevic, Manzi, & Zachariah, N.D.). Momentarily, Sophia is still active within Phase Two Alpha. Phase Two Bravo and Phase Three are thus far unreachable because the EU needs a legal mandate to operate within Libyan territorial waters and shores (Drent, 2018).

Sophia is coordinated from the Italian flagship Garibaldi, and compromises and an additional seven ships that are employed by EU MSs, such as the UK, Germany and Spain. Additional assets at Sophia’s disposal are four helicopters and three aeroplanes. Latest data on the personnel active within the operations accounted for 1,771 people (European Commission, 2016). Although Sophia’s fleet is provided by a multitude of EU MSs, Italy still makes the most substantial contribution by far (EPSC, 2017). Sophia’s mandate has been extended on several occasions, on which the latest expansion is still valid until 30 September 2019 (Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/535). The costs for the extended period, lasting from April until end of September 2019, is calculated to be over 2,7 million Euros.

Remarkably – and deemed controvertially – Sophia’s latter Phases are subjected to international legal frameworks. To enter into Phase Two Bravo and Phase Three, it would require international cooperation from Libya in order to operate within Libyan territories. The initial goals include the transition to Phase Two Bravo, which implies entering Libyan territorial sea (Bevilacqua, 2017). In order to enter into Libyan territories, a unified Libya with an effective, cooperating government is a requirement. These preconditions are not applicable in the short term, and are even blurry for the long term, due to the complicated political situation in Libya at the moment (Drent, 2018). However, if the political situation in Libya stays the same or deters, the consequences are that smugglers will keep on sending migrants onto the Mediterranean in dangerous fishing boats. Hence,

21 Also familiar under the names IS, Islamic State, or ISIS.
Sophia is still active on the High Seas to operate within its mandate to combat even higher death tolls and numerous trafficking networks.

5.4 NON-GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

In 2014, the statistics for SAR efforts comprised of 51 per cent by the Italian Navy and Custom Police, 23 per cent by the Italian Coast Guards, and around 25 per cent accounted for the remaining merchant ships crossing the Mediterranean (EPSC, 2017). However, per mid-2014, NGOs started to employ SAR operations within the region as well on their account, based on their national flag. These NGO operations were, at first hand, pursued by philanthropists and equipped with little assets and vessels.

Throughout the Mediterranean crisis, more NGOs with humanitarian SAR mandates became active within the region. The objectives for these NGO operations are (almost) always based on humanitarian consideration. More prominent NGOs operate with larger vessels that enable them to conduct fully-fledged SAR operations, while smaller NGOs focus exclusively on on-the-spot SAR activities, distributing drinking water, life jackets, and provide urgent medical care.

The NGOs which operate on a humanitarian search and rescue basis are listed as follows; Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Sea-Watch (Germany), SOS Méditerranée, Pro-Activa (Spain), Sea-Eye (Germany), Jugend Rettet (Germany), Refugee Boat Foundation/Bootvluchteling (the Netherlands), Save the Children (United Kingdom). In 2016, a total of nine NGOs had an active SAR fleet and was responsible for 22 per cent of all the rescues in the Central Mediterranean (EPSC, 2017).

Although it may seem such NGO operations may alleviate the amount of SAR activities the EU operations would need to carry out, the relationship between the EU and these humanitarian NGOs is not always beneficial to both parties. The growing diversity of actors has made formal identification processes of migrants more difficult (Ibid.). It also challenges the securitisation of the external borders of the EU, as the NGO operations shuttle the migrants into Italian ports. It has, at multiple times and even to this day, led to the closure of the Italian harbour ports by the Italian government, after which the NGO vessels could not dock for days and were stuck out on sea (Barslund & Ludolph, 2017; Giuffrida, 2019).

The problematic relationship between the EU, Italy and the NGO’s that deploy SAR vessels to the Mediterranean Sea was attempted to rectify with a ‘Code of Conduct’ in 2017. Under that code, Italy presented that “NGOs are banned from entering Libyan waters to rescue migrants, are obliged to accept the deployment of Italian vessels with armed police on board to investigate people trafficking
in Libyan waters in cooperation with the Libyan authorities, and are not permitted to transfer people who have been rescued to other vessels at sea, with rescue crews being required to return to port for disembarkation” (European Parliament, 2017).

The initiative received support from the EC in its aim to regulate NGO SAR missions offshore Libya. The Code of Conduct was drafted in response to the Italian frustrations with the lack of EU-wide solidarity, as well as the accusation against NGOs of serving as pull-factors for migration because of their presence at sea (Cusumano, 2019a). The Code was to be signed by active maritime NGOs, and refusal of signage would result in further refusal to authorise the disembarkation of migrants in Italian ports (Ibid). The Code is controversial because it arguably forces NGOs to compromise on the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence (Cusumano, 2018); this is a clear securitising move in which a tightening grip over maritime NGOs is attempted, compromising the ability of NGOs to conduct humanitarian relief at sea free of political interference (Cusumano, 2019a).
6 The Narratives on Security Practices

The Mediterranean migration crisis is not remarkable in the sense that migration is not a new topic within the European agenda. Migration has been the leading cause of concern for European citizens since the early 1990s (Musarò, 2017). The debate between who is alarmed by a potential invasion of terrorists through the means of migration and who are preoccupied with the humanitarian responsibility of safeguarding the human rights of people who need protection is not unfamiliar in European politics. Nor is it surprising that with every migration crisis, politicians and the media represent those crossing borders as a significant threat (Pastore, Monzini, & Sciortino, 2006).

The Mediterranean Migration Crisis is thus no different with regards to the crisis narratives that are employed to signify the threatening existence of migration. Even during the peak in 2015, the intake of refugees by European MSs only amounts to 0.2 per cent of its total EU population (Musarò, 2017). Nonetheless, an exaggeration of these numbers aims to justify the interventions the policymakers and institutions take. The arguments that justify ‘humanitarian interventions’ as well as ‘expanded sea border control’ are used to “produce meaning in order to set the political agenda” (Ibid., p. 14). In line with the securitisation approach of the Paris School, this chapter discusses how multiple techniques and rationales work when deployed as SAR instruments in particular, and migration control in general. By using discourse analysis throughout this chapter, it focuses on the practices of the EU and relevant politicians that are used to set the agenda for securitising moves and to justify these moves.

The discursive aspects of the securitisation process in place are analysed, which are close to speech acts (Balzacq, 2011). Several narratives can be identified within de categories of ‘restructuring borders’, ‘threatening numbers’, and ‘fighting smugglers’. The non-discursive elements are also examined to underwrite the securitising instruments employed by the EU; this is necessary to distinguish between the discursive narratives, which sometimes overlap. The non-discursive practices provide the dispositif, the practices and instrumental tools for securitisation purposes, and therefore contribute to a better understanding of the manifestation of securitisation when the discursive elements contradict each other. The discourse analysis follows a chronological order to allow for clear visualisation of securitisation and the narratives employed.
6.1 Restructuring the External Borders
On October 9th 2013, Commissioner Cecilia Malmström spoke during the press conference in Lampedusa.

“I will never forget the sight of 280 coffins today. I will bear this with me for the rest of my life and I think they express something we need to think about in the European Union, this isn’t the EU we want,”, she follows, “The recent tragic events call for action at EU level. In order to prevent these tragedies we have to act in the short, medium, and long term. In the short term we have to increase our search and rescue efforts. [...]. We also need a change of approach towards migration [in the long term]. The recent events have shown that this restrictive approach is not a sustainable one and that it is time to move towards more openness and solidarity” (Speech/13/799, 2013).

Two weeks after the tragedy, EC President José Barroso spoke during the EP plenary debate in which he stated:

“[...] The character and the scale of the problem calls for stronger measures to organise search and rescue operations to save lives in danger, to better protect our borders and effectively tackle the criminal networks behind the migration flows and to protect those in need. [...] Knowing well that most responsibilities [for such activities] and competences lie at national level” (Speech/13/847, 2013).

It needs to be kept in mind that the EC, which Malmström and Barroso belong, is a body that needs to act in the interest of the whole union (Emiliani, 2016). This discourse is visible throughout Barroso’s speech, which serves the indication of the EU’s reluctance to openly declare its commitment to SAR activities. These indications are confirmed in another speech of President Barroso.

“There are some things we can do at national level, others we have to do at European level. [...] The Commission is trying to raise awareness regarding this problem. [...] The EU does not have airplanes, we do not have ships, we do not have these means. But I believe through good cooperation between our Member States much more can be achieved, showing also solidarity towards those most exposed. [...] A concrete announcement I can make today, [is] for additional funding for Italy of 30 million euros, but of course we know that much more has to be done together with our Member States” (Speech/13/792, 2013).

Due to the widely publicised tragedies in combination with the EU’s reluctance, Italy was enabled to conduct proactive SAR within its national competences with the use of 34 warships and 900 sailors (Patalano, 2015, p. 17; Musarò, 2017). The launch of Mare Nostrum, the military-humanitarian operation deployed by the Italian Navy and Coastguard, was a transformative moment in the communication strategies of Italy (Musarò, 2017). Until October 2013, the news on dead migrants had
been limited. Formerly, images circulating on the subject often portrayed those rescued as opposed to those who drowned.

The tragedy at Lampedusa delivered the images of the sight of 280 coffins, presenting the audience with a narrative of (the need for) rescue in the Mediterranean (Ibid.). For the first time during migrant crises, photographs and videos about the operations on the high seas were produced. The press statements, images, and videos which were released during the operation can be considered as materials for institutional artefacts whose visibility influences public discourses, collective ways of thinking, and the decision-making processes around the migration crisis (Ibid.).

On the Italian Navy's website, it is stated that Mare Nostrum was established "to tackle the dramatic increase of migratory flows during the second half of [2013] and consequent tragic shipwrecks off the island of Lampedusa" (Musarò, 2019, p. 150). Simultaneously, "the naval and air units deployed by Mare Nostrum were necessary to improve maritime security, patrol sea lanes and combat illegal activities, especially human trafficking" (Ibid.). By addressing both sides of the coin, the narrative provided speaks different languages to different constituencies. A protectionist language of surveillance, policing, and border control speaks to the concerns of citizens and protectionist governments and warns smugglers. The humanitarian language addresses the audience of migrants, transnational activists, and NGO’s.

Furthermore, the Mare Nostrum produced a discourse of numbers. When the operation was discontinued, the communication of the Italian Navy focused primarily on its success by numbers. This focus on celebratory numbers and results follows a general trend throughout the press statements of the operation.

“During the last 364 days of relentless activity in all weather conditions, the units of the Italian Navy have engaged in 421 operations and rescued 150,810 migrants; 5 [smuggler] mother ships have been seized and 330 alleged smugglers have been brought to justice. These results have been achieved by 900 soldiers engaged on any single day, 32 naval units and 2 submarines taking shifts in over 45,000 hours of active operations” (Italian Navy, 2014; Musarò, 2017, p. 17)

When such a story is produced and thoroughly documented by the Italian Navy and European media in general, a story that speaks multiple languages and deploys several narratives, an ‘us’ (European citizens) and a ‘them’ (migrants or smugglers) is represented. Such representations aid the construction of imaginary borders between these alleged opposites. These imaginary borders enact symbolic and political barriers that, in return, contribute to the institutional framing of future SAR operations. Whereas the ‘border of Europe’ used to be perceived at European islands like Lampedusa, the renewed focus on the external frontiers and the ‘them’ on the other side of that frontier – whether
it is ‘pitiful’ them or a dangerous them – moved the ‘border of Europe’ into the Mediterranean High Seas (Musarò, 2017).

The new narratives of communication which were produced by the Italian Navy, as well as the EU’s initial reluctance to offer substantial SAR aid or own SAR missions, have eventually led to the securitised set-ups of the subsequent SAR operations. The military and humanitarian elements of Mare Nostrum are essential marks of first securitising acts. The considerable border restructuring and the use of specific narratives, frames, and storylines in the way of addressing the people on boats, changed the notion of these people from referent objects as refugees who should benefit from international protection, to migrants at sea, shipwrecked persons who need to be rescued – as opposed to protected (Tazzioli, 2016).

During Operation Mare Nostrum, the Italian cabinet hoped to obtain EU-wide support for its costly SAR mission, leveraging on the upcoming Italian European Council presidency (Cusumano, 2019b). However, other EU Members accused the operation of serving as a pull factor for migration and therefore did not want to back Italy (Carrera & Den Hertog, 2015). Italy was frustrated with the lack of EU solidarity in sharing its burden, and in combination with the high costs of Mare Nostrum, led to the termination of the SAR mission. Despite Mare Nostrum being discontinued after one year, the handover to Triton marked a further border displacement with regards to migration policies at sea towards a renewed strategy of not letting people arrive on European soil (Tazzioli, 2016; Carrera & Den Hertog, 2015).

6.2 Creating a Threat in Numbers

“Italy and the EU Agency Frontex are making good progress in preparing the joint operation Triton, coordinated by Frontex. [...] With the launch of the Triton operation, tailored to the needs and requests defined by the Italian authorities, the EU can show concrete solidarity to Italy, by reinforcing its border surveillance and supporting its humanitarian efforts. [...] It is clear that the Triton operation cannot and will not replace Mare Nostrum” (Statement/14/302, 2014).

A few months before this statement, Commissioner Malmström welcomed the EP’s vote on new rules for Frontex-coordinated sea border operations (Statement/14/131, 2014). The new Regulation is unusual in the sense that it replaced a Council Decision that was annulled by the EU Court of Justice. An EU Regulation applies “automatically and uniformly to all EU countries as soon as they enter into force, without needing to be transposed into national law. They are binding in their entirety on all EU countries” (European Commission, N.D.). A Council Decision is also binding in its entirety; however, “a decision which specifies those to whom it is addressed shall be binding only to them” (Ibid.). Therefore,
the provisions on SAR and disembarkation are entirely binding, whereas the Council Decision was non-binding. The Court found that the provisions were essential elements of external maritime border surveillance, and therefore a pass of the EP was required to establish the new Frontex Regulation.

Although the Frontex Operation Triton was established to assist Italy through its extended SAR capabilities, Frontex was never a SAR body to begin with. Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos mentioned the priorities of Frontex overtly. On the website of Frontex, it is confirmed that the primary focus of operation Triton is border control, according to the mandate of Frontex (Frontex, 2014).

“Our border management policy is clearly a priority. We believe that a higher level of security is compatible with the full protection of migrants’ rights. Even though Frontex is not a search and rescue body, it can operationally support Member States to deal with such situations, such as through the reinforced joint operation Triton, launched on 1 November” (Speech/14/1601, 2014).

At the beginning of its mission, Frontex also followed the trend of numbers:

“Although some data are still missing for December 2014, the number of detections of illegal border crossings in 2014 as a whole totalled about 278,000. This is two and a half times larger than the year before (107,000) and twice as much as in 2011 (141,000) during the initial stages of the Arab Spring. This increase is mostly connected to the increasing number of refugees and displaced people worldwide, related to the ongoing conflicts [...] which have created the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War” (EU Briefing, 2015).

The use of language, numbers, and percentages portrays to suggest that the refugee crisis will only increase further in the future, even if it is already the biggest migration crisis the EU has seen since the Second World War. Such a narrative almost attaches a sense ‘impending doom’ on the EU. By stating that the refugee crisis and therefore, the migration crisis will grow significantly, an initial step is made in legitimising extraordinary measures to ensure more intensive border management.

Such extraordinary measures were needed during 2015 when the numbers of migrants crossing the Mediterranean peaked. The twin shipwrecks occurred, arrivals were not dropping, the mortality rate remained high, and the NGO’s SAR Missions were privatising because of accusations that Frontex was too focused on border control instead of proactive SAR. During a special European Council meeting on migration, the Council President Donald Tusk remarked:
“Leaders were unanimous on the need to act concretely and rapidly. A challenge in de South is not only a challenge for Southern Europe but for the whole of Europe. And we have no illusions. We are facing a difficult summer ahead” (Speech/237/15, 2015).

President Tusk prioritised several main areas of action. First, the confrontation of smugglers and traffickers is necessary. President Tusk already mentions a possible CSDP operation to confront the smugglers and traffickers; this indicates the foreshadowing plans of Operation EUNAVFOR Med Sophia. Second, the financial resources available to the border operations Triton and Poseidon are tripled.

These are examples of extraordinary measures taken for increased security. The enhanced resources are “to ensure that people do not get on the boats in the first place, which is the best way to protect them” (Speech/237/15, 2015) as well as “to restore the level of intervention provided under the former Italian Mare Nostrum operation” (European Agenda on Migration, 2015). Furthermore, Frontex’s capacities also underwrite cooperation with “key African and neighbourhood countries” to reduce the influx of migrants via those transit countries. However, this externalisation of migration policies undermines the international protection of refugees, yet the protocol of Frontex is proposed as a set plan if a similar situation arises in the future.

“The rules of engagement agreed for Triton operations should be seen as the model for future action on the whole of the external land and sea border” (European Agenda on Migration, 2015).

The narratives Frontex produced mainly consisted of demonstrating significant growth in numbers. By doing so, the specific growth figures aid to give more urgency, because the crisis ‘is only getting bigger’. It is pivotal for the securitising actor to confirm the importance of their role as providers of protection and security (Bigo, 2002). Because a certain degree of urgency is attached to Frontex statements, it enables the demand for ‘suitable and sustainable solutions’, and in turn legitimises the role of Frontex within intensive border management. Frontex’s enhanced security role was set in stone with the new Operational Plan for Operation Triton.

“[It] sets out the new number of assets: 10 maritime, 33 land and 8 air assets, and 121 human resources. The Operational Plan also extends the geographical area of Triton southwards to the borders of the Maltese search and rescue zone to cover the area of the former Italian Mare Nostrum Operation” (IP/15/5039, 2015).

The measures to strengthen the Union’s external borders was accompanied by the proposal of a new European Border and Coast Guard in the light of the refugee crisis. Although it has a new shiny name, it still has the same legal personality as Frontex. President Juncker addressed the Parliament;
The rhetoric used here is an evident identification with the audience through ‘we Europeans’, creating the idea of a strong European identity, but also an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ narrative; however, Juncker does not identify what or whom the threat is.

The non-identification of what or whom the threat is is remarkable. Almost every statement or press release with regards to SAR activities states that the EU deplores to continuing loss of migrants’ lives at sea. However, these losses are employed to legitimise the strengthening of Operation Triton by increasing its presence at sea and other resources. The increased presence at sea is necessary to fight smugglers and human traffickers. Therefore, the new Operational Plan for Triton falls within the scope of the new European Border and Coast Guard, indicating that Triton’s priority is still securing the external borders of the Union. Hence, the loss of lives and adherent concerns for human rights are used to legitimise the strengthening of the external European borders as a whole.

When looking into the regulation of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, these priorities can also be deducted from the phrasing and structuring of the amendments. The Regulation calls immediately for;

“Wider efforts in resolving unprecedented migratory flows towards Union territory [...], including by reinforcing border management to better manage growing mixed migratory flows. [It furthermore] stresses the need to tackle the dramatic situation at the external borders and to strengthen the controls at those borders”. Moreover, “the objective of Union policy in the field of external border management is to develop and implement European integrated border management at national and Union level, which is a necessary corollary to the free movement of persons within the Union and is a fundamental component of an area of freedom, security and justice” (Regulation (EU) 2016/1624).

It is noteworthy that, within the regulation, the term ‘search and rescue’ is only mentioned at the eleventh bullet-point, with a total mentioning of 9 times. In contrast, a quick search on the term ‘border management’ results in 48 hits. Moreover, the article (47) that addresses SAR with regards to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (‘the Charter’), even lists that the Agency is responsible for border management before its responsibility for Search and Rescue is mentioned. It questions the sincerity of the EU viewing the migrants as the referent object who needs to be protected, or if it is ‘European society’ who needs the Union’s protection. While the EU and its policymakers almost always refer to human rights in their speeches, public statements, and press
releases, these human rights concerns are not a priority in the legislation concerning search and rescue nor border management.

6.3 FIGHTING SMUGGLERS WITH EXTRAORDINARY MEANS

Operation Triton was veiled by layers of ambiguity from its inception onwards. The expectations and wishes of its operational conduct and purposes were altered according to whichever direction the wind of the crisis blew, as long as the focus was on securing the borders. The outward communication of Frontex, nonetheless, placed considerable emphasis on the conduct of maritime search and rescue, even when this commitment was not matched by consistent action (Cusumano, 2019b). When Triton’s range of action was officially extended in 2015, the EU simultaneously launched the EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia (Tazzioli, 2016).

The establishment of Operation Sophia can be read within a broader comprehensive approach on how the EU wants to handle migration. On 18 May 2015, the Council adopted a Decision which approved the “Crisis Management Concept for a Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) Operation to disrupt the business model of smugglers in the Southern Central Mediterranean” (Council Decision (CFSP) 2015/778; PRES/301/15, 2015). Sophia’s outward communication also stressed the need to “prevent human tragedies” in the Mediterranean Sea. Although Sophia was launched at the perceived worsening of the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean, its mandate fell under the scope of a CSDP military mission with an anti-smuggling objective. HR/VP Mogherini introduced the announcement speech of Operation Sophia as follows;

“The EU has never taken the issue as seriously as we are doing now. With this operation, we are targeting the business model of those who benefit from the misery of migrants. [...] As EU, we are determined to contribute to save lives, dismantle the networks of the smugglers of human beings and address the root causes of migration” (PRES/482/15, 2015).

Although ‘Search and Rescue’ is only mentioned once in the Council Decision, rebranding the operation to ‘Sophia’, the name of the to a Somali-mother born baby aboard a SAR vessel of the operation, was a nice touch to epitomize Sophia as a humanitarian mission (Cusumano, 2019b; PRES/678/15, 2015). The name change signifies the use of heuristic artefacts, as explained by the PS approach (Balzacq, 2011), to reach out and sympathise with a broader audience to gain their approval for Union’s actions.
These aims of Operation Sophia were intended to be conducted in three sequential phases, of which the middle phase consisted of two separate steps\(^\text{22}\). The vote on the transition from one phase to the next is with the Political and Security Committee and the Council of the EU. Momentarily, the operation is stuck in the transition between Phase Two Alpha and Phase Two Bravo. Phase Two Alpha includes the "boarding, searching, seizure and diversion on the high seas of vessels suspected of being used for human smuggling", after which Phase Two Bravo extends the conduct "on the high seas or in the territorial and international waters of that State" (Council Decision (CFSP) 2015/778). Phase Three then continues with the premise of disposing of the smugglers’ vessels "in the territory of that State". For Phase Two Bravo and Phase Three to be conducted, it should be "in accordance with any applicable UN Security Council Resolution or consent by the coastal State concerned" (Ibid.), because it requires the presence of Operation Sophia outside EU territory. With Sophia’s geographical notification on the Southern Central Mediterranean Route, this is Libya.

It is noteworthy that Operation Sophia enjoys broad support from EU MSs (Bevilacqua, 2017). Because Sophia is conducted under the mandate of a Council Decision, it is a non-legislative act and therefore non-binding. Sophia is reliant upon the contributions of military personnel and weaponry from 22 MSs (Ibid.). As a result of the non-binding character of Sophia, the idea of ‘the EU as one’ and ‘the borders belong to every EU citizen’ is often emphasised to generate EU-wide support for Sophia. For instance, in 2017, Council President Tusk stated the following after the European Council meetings on migration:

> "[The] discussion […] confirmed the hierarchy of our aims, where protecting our territory, protecting our external borders as well as stemming illegal migration come first" (Statement/813/17, 2017).

The insinuation of ‘protecting our territory’, in relationship to Sophia’s operational phases that stress the ‘dismantling of the smuggler networks’ in international and Libyan territorial waters, is remarkable. With Mare Nostrum functioning as the instigator of the symbolic and political restructuring of the external borders of the EU, the operational locations of the Union’s SAR operations eventually led to a proposal of conducting military-led missions ‘of protection’ outside of the compounds of Europe’s maritime territorial waters. However, to exercise enforcement jurisdiction with military assets in different marine zones, such as Libyan territorial and internal waters, against smuggler networks, the consent of Libya or a UN Security Council mandate is required (Bevilacqua, 2017).

\(^{22}\) See p. 47 for an extensive explanation of the three phases.
Because of the requirement of Libyan consent or a UN mandate, the transition of Operation Sophia to Phase Two Bravo – to enter Libyan territorial sea – has been challenged. HR/VP Mogherini informed the Security Council in May 2015 of the “Union’s need to work with the support of the UN” to manage the Mediterranean crisis (Council Decision (CFSP) 2015/778, Art. 4). The UN’s answer to the Union’s request stated:

“Europe should focus on saving lives when dealing with migration [rather than on military actions]. More effective law enforcement measures against traffickers and smugglers [are] not enough” (EP News, 2015; Bevilacqua, 2017, p. 175).

Nonetheless, after negotiations between the EU and the UN, a UN Regulation was invoked which allowed the EU Operation Sophia to cover the high seas off the coasts of Libya – but not the Libyan territorial sea (Bevilacqua, 2017). The language of the UN Resolution warrants against a blanket mandate to the use of force by the EU.

“With a view to saving the threatened lives of migrants or of victims of human trafficking, [the UN] authorise[s], in these exceptional and specific circumstances [and] for a period of one year […], [the EU] to inspect on the high seas off the coast of Libya” (UNSCR 2240/2015).

For a full modus operandi of Sophia’s mandate, the EU has been seeking to obtain the consent of Libya to enter territorial waters (Bevilacqua, 2017). However, Libyan authorities lack the capacity as well as willingness to provide such authorisation, as Libya’s political climate is problematic due to a civil war in which many parties seek to gain the power of government. Operation Sophia’s mandate envisions enforcement measures which may interfere with the fundamental principle of territorial sovereignty (Bevilacqua, 2017, p. 176) – and territorial sovereignty is precisely what is at stake in Libya’s political crisis. Hence, the EU looked elsewhere to exert some control over Libyan territories. After the adoption of the UN Resolution, two tasks were added to Sophia’s mandate.

 “[The supporting tasks include] capacity building and training of, and information sharing with, the Libyan Coastguard and Navy, based on a request by the legitimate Libyan authorities taking into account the need for Libyan ownership, [and] contributing to information sharing, as well as implementation of the UN arms embargo on the High Seas off the coast of Libya on the basis of a new UNSC Resolution” (PRES/267/16).

The statement on the training of the Libyan Coastguard and Navy is particularly interesting in its referral to Search and Rescue. The training of the Libyan Coastguard and Navy portrays as a means to exert some power over Libyan territorial water, if only indirectly. Therefore, it can be deduced that the EU tries to ‘divert’ its SAR responsibilities towards Libya.
With regards to Sophia’s SAR objective, it is noteworthy to mention that Sophia’s military ships are not registered in the geolocalisation system of the Italian MRCC. Reason being that Sophia deploys military vessels whose position is classified for security reasons (Cusumano, 2019b). Consequentially, the MRCC cannot identify and therefore not task a Sophia vessel with SAR activities when needed. Because Sophia’s vessels do not disclose their position, it allows them to operate close to migrant boats without being called upon a SAR mission (Ibid.); this significantly reduced the number of SAR involvement by Operation Sophia. This conduct was under the radar, and therefore, uncriticised until StateWatch leaked a confidential EEAS report that explained these low SAR numbers (EEAS, 2016; Cusumano, 2019b).

The leaked report furthermore mentions that “most migrants die inside or very close to Libyan territorial waters” (EEAS, 2016, p. 7). However, with the training of the Libyan Coastguard and Navy, the number of migrants rescued has increased (Ibid.). In contrast, NGO’s contend that the Libyan Coastguard instead focuses on migrant interdiction than on SAR. SAR operations deployed by NGOs are even alleged to be hindered and by the Libyan Coastguard, which is under investigation by the International Criminal Court (Reuters, 2017; Cusumano, 2019b).

The operational and communicative conduct of EUNAVFOR Operation Sophia signals a twist in the politics of the EU. It encapsulates a humanitarian narrative on the protection of migrants from smugglers; however, the narrative instead seems to function as a disguise for warfare against smugglers (Tazzioli, 2016). It reveals a military-humanitarian rationale through which migrants can only be sufficiently protected if they do not board a smugglers’ vessel. The portrayal of its alleged humanitarian nature is an evident strategy for the legitimisation of extraordinary measures taken for security reasons. The extraordinary measures of the Operational Plan of Sophia in which Libyan territories needed to be entered – albeit in violation of the principle of territorial sovereignty – is a bold securitising move. One can only wonder if Sophia’s mandate would have included such objectives if Mare Nostrum and Triton had not set the stage for such a securitising move. Moreover, diversion of Sophia’s SAR responsibilities to the Libyan Coastguard and Navy signifies its Janus-faced humanitarian objective.
These sentences function as the opening statement by HR/VP Mogherini on the most recent shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea on the 26th of July 2019. Within this statement, the incongruity of the EU’s narratives on its SAR objectives is witnessed. The mentioning “every life lost [on the Mediterranean] is one too many” in one breath with “the acceleration of resettlements and voluntary returns” exemplifies the latest state of conduct by the EU in light of SAR activities. In order to understand how the Union’s securitising narratives, in which humanitarian and securitising elements are simultaneously uttered, it is necessary to simplify the scheme of securitisation again.

Therefore, this chapter finally returns to the research question presented in the introduction; How has securitisation affected the European Union’s Search and Rescue activities during the Mediterranean migration crisis? The following sections answer this research question and discuss the findings from the analyses throughout chapters 4, 5, and 6. Additionally, the limitations of the research are discussed, and suggestions for further research are made. Finally, it reflects upon the past and present situation in the Mediterranean and the humanitarian-security nexus that seem to hold the EU captive as a result of the contradiction between the Union’s discursive and non-discursive practices.

7.1 Answering the Research Question

To answer the research question quite bold; securitisation has affected the EU’s SAR activities during the Mediterranean migration crisis through the disguise of a humanitarian narrative to enhance the Union’s border control capacities. To answer the research question more eloquently, this section elaborates upon the chain of securitisation – who convinces which audience to accept what existential threat for which referent object, and which extraordinary measures were taken to mitigate the security problem. In addition, it explains the storylines and narrative which aided and legitimised the securitising moves, and how these narratives stand in relation to the practices and policy tools
employed. The results are presented according to ‘the what, the who, and the how’ of Balzacq’s securitisation matrix.

![Securitisation analysis in context](image)

**Figure 3.2. Securitisation analysis in context (Balzacq, 2011, p. 37).**

### 7.1.1 The ‘What’

From 2014 onwards over half a million people crossed the Central Mediterranean route towards Italy. The number of recorded people dying or missing steadily increased too, and exceeds over 10,000 people in the same stretch of water (McMahon & Sigona, 2018). These high numbers are the reason why the majority of the SAR operations are deployed along the Central Mediterranean route. Whereas the Eastern Mediterranean route is controlled by the EU-Turkey deal, the Central route still knows many casualties. The political unrest ‘across the pond’ in North-Africa does not allow for a similar deal to contain the Central migratory flow.

As a result, the EU and the Italian government have responded to resort the Central Mediterranean migratory flow of being a crisis. Although the many casualties do indicate critical numbers, the declaration of it being a crisis also announces the need for the crisis to be resolved. A migration crisis proclaims political narratives of uncontrolled, illegal and irregular migration to the EU. Declarations of crises have a political function, and often the function is securitisation.

Securitisation enables states “to justify exceptional migration control measures and expand their geopolitical influence beyond their own borders” (McMahon & Sigona, 2018, p. 498; Mountz & Hiemstra, 2014). By claiming the situation in the Mediterranean Sea as a crisis, the EU was able to start to inform and justify an expansion of policy instruments to seek control of migration and the external

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23 See figure 3.2 again, more explanation on this scheme on pp. 26-30.
borders. It lent urgency to the unification of maritime EU operations of the Central Mediterranean route (McMahon & Sigona, 2018). As a result, border security operations and humanitarian search and rescue operations have intersected at sea (Tazzioli, 2016; McMahon & Sigona, 2018).

7.1.2 The ‘Who’

The securitising actor was *a priori* identified as the European Union as an institution in general because the operators of the SAR missions deployed conducted under different hats; the Italian Navy, Frontex, and CSDP. The audience is the MSs because the EU needs its permission in some fashion to implement policy tools. For EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia, this permission implied a non-binding Council Decision, for Frontex Joint Operation Triton it meant a Regulation which is binding automatically and uniformly to all MSs. The referent object can *initially* be identified as the migrants, or at least the migrants threatened by becoming the victim of the smuggler networks, and as a result, threatened with drowning in the Mediterranean open sea. The latter identifications of the referent object and the existential threat, however, becomes distorted throughout the process of the Union’s SAR operations.

Although the EU does not use the word ‘threat’ when referring to migrants, ‘migration’ is the security issue that ‘overflows’ Europe with people seeking protection. These migratory flows, as illustrated throughout chapter 4, are formulated as a security problem, and therefore, solutions are required which control those flows. If migration, and thus migrants, need to be controlled because they are a security problem, it is implied that the referent object which needs protection from the migrants are the EU citizens or European society in general. However, the securitisation chain of actors does not reveal ‘EU citizens’ as the referent object per se.

The initial observation is thus that the EU protects the migrants from the smuggler networks. These smugglers and human trafficking networks are viewed as the prime cause of people dying at sea. Nonetheless, because the EU also points their finger towards the migrants themselves as an issue, another securitisation chain of actors is revealed; the EU needs to protect X from migratory flows by targeting the smuggler networks. What the referent object ‘X’ exactly constitutes, is left implicit. If X is not the migrants, perhaps the X implies European society. However, it is then unclear how the smuggler networks are a direct threat to the EU citizens in general. Additionally, it is also unclear where the protection of the migrants can be placed within the latter chain of securitisation actors.

The first chain of securitisation would be evident through the investigation of the SAR Operations if the Copenhagen School approach were applied in isolation throughout this research. The use of language and how the words are articulated and formulated in speeches and statements are quite sure and evident. Such a ‘superficial’ discourse analysis only pinpoints at direct utterances. Examples of these throughout the Mediterranean migration crisis are the referrals to the high numbers
of migrants crossing the Mediterranean and the need for prevention of further loss of life at sea. If the texts would only be read once without taking in regard the context in which the text is uttered, it seems evident that the purpose of the EU SAR operations is to securitise the migrants from the human smugglers, saving them from death at sea.

However, if the discourse analysis is done in line with the PS approach, and the space between the lines is given consideration with regards to the context, heuristic artefacts, and so forth, a different narrative is shaped. The references towards a comprehensive, suitable, and sustainable approach of the migration crisis and the resulting SAR activities emphasise that the smuggler networks are not the only existential threat. Yes, the smugglers are the ones who will be securitised as being the threat by a ‘suitable and sustainable’ Mediterranean operation, but they will not be the only ones negatively affected by it.

On the securitisation chain of whom convinces which audience to accept what existential threat for which referent object, it also seems that the EU wants to portray the migrants as the audience as well as the referent object; this is done through the reasoning of convincing the migrants to accept the existential threat of drowning by getting on boats provided by smugglers and therefore their safest option – with themselves, the migrants, functioning as the referent object again – to not cross the Mediterranean Sea. Where the migrants fleeing violence and oppression should go otherwise, is unspecified by the Union. The only referral made is ‘crucial cooperation with neighbouring and African countries’ in the European Agenda on Migration.

7.1.3 The ‘How’
The mismatch between the instruments and resources available to the deployed SAR missions and their humanitarian rhetoric can be viewed as a mismatch between the normative expectations and security interests the EU wanted to embrace (Cusumano, 2019b). The normative clash resulted in “disproportionate rhetorical emphasis on tasks that cannot be conducted in full due to a lack of consensus between the MSs. [The clash] entraps the EU in a predicament of its own making, widening the gap between what EU external action is expected to accomplish and what it can realistically deliver” (Cusumano, 2019b, p. 15; Schimmelfennig, 2001).

The mandates of the three SAR operations and their available assets mostly consisted of resources designed for border control missions to assist the identification of irregular migrants and the prosecution of human smugglers (Cusumano, 2019b). Simultaneously, the operations had the normative obligation to search migrants in emergency and rescue them from drowning. European society and NGOs added pressure to these normative obligations to conduct more proactive SAR.
However, protectionist governments of EU MSs considered the SAR missions to be a pull factor which leads to increasing the irregular migratory flows into the EU.

The SAR operations placed considerable emphasis on the conduct of maritime SAR activities in their outward communication. However, the commitment to SAR was not matched by consistent action (Cusumano, 2019b); this is due to the operational choices of including SAR activities within the notion of border surveillance (Tazzioli, 2016). Border control practices and anti-smuggling objectives were prioritised over the enforcement of Search and Rescue. However, the legislative inclusion of SAR operationally widened the resources and scope of conduct for the EU Operations to enhance and reinforce their border control objectives.

Therefore, an intensification of securitisation rhetoric can be observed. Since Mare Nostrum’s inception, throughout Triton and Sophia, the co-existence of the humanitarian narratives of saving lives and the securitised narratives of enhanced border control and migration management have been highlighted. Securitisation has affected the Union’s SAR activities under the disguise of a humanitarian discourse. The humanitarian discourse enabled the legitimisation of the Union’s enhanced border control measures and objectives, in the name of safety, protection and security, by means of three narratives. The narratives used to justify the Union’s securitising moves can be categorised as ‘restructuring the external borders’, ‘creating a threat in numbers’, and ‘fighting the smuggler networks’.

The narrative for restructuring the external borders enables for the idea that the European frontier was within the Mediterranean Sea, rather than within national MSs territorial waters. Therefore, the pathway was cleared to expand the ‘European zone’ which needed to be secured. A threat in numbers was created to emphasise the severity of the Mediterranean crisis and to address that immediate measures were required. Large numbers speak to the imagination of people and reflect storylines of being ‘overrun’ by the threat. The narrative of fighting the smugglers opened the doors for military control measures against the ‘threat in numbers’ and enables the reinforcement of these control measures offshore the Libyan coast because the borders were previously restructured beyond territorial EU waters.

The survival of the SAR operations required the legitimisation of the audience – approval by the EU Member States. In order to gain legitimisation, the EU exercised complex diplomatic discourses in which different and contradictory expectations had to be mediated (Cusumano, 2019b). On the one hand, the EU needed to portray adherence to its legal as well as moral and normative duties to be a ‘force for good in the world’. On the other hand, the EU also needed to take responsibility for fulfilling its core mandate of combatting smuggling and limiting the migratory flows. The rhetorical emphasis
on humanitarian activities, in contrast with the operational prioritisation of border control practices, led to a stark decoupling of talk and action (Ibid.).

This thesis examined which storylines and practices are observed within a discourse that portrays itself to be humanitarian at first sight, however, shifted towards a securitised discourse in the course of the deployments of the EU operations. The Mediterranean migration crisis is, therefore, ultimately presented as a threat against the interests of the Union; this portrayal was imperative to legitimise the extraordinary means which developed throughout the deployment of the SAR operations.

The SAR operations were launched in response to tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea and were expected to comply with the legal and moral imperative to rescue migrants (Cusumano, 2019b). However, their objectives also prioritised to reduce the illegal and irregular sea crossing into the Southern external frontier of the Union. Because the conduct of proactive SAR operations was framed as facilitating the ‘business model of smuggling networks and human traffickers’, the simultaneous accomplishment of the overall objectives of all three EU SAR operations proved problematic.

The strong rhetorical commitment of the European Union to Search and Rescue and to act on releasing the suffering of maritime tragedies is in suspicious contrast with the mandates and objectives the Union’s operations were endowed with and the realities of their operational Search and Rescue conduct. Instead of perceiving the migratory flows to be consisted out of people fleeing from oppression and violence and in need of protection, they become targets of border surveillance and control activities in the name of extra needed security. Security for whom remains to be decided by who is acting.

7.2 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After answering the research question and the theoretical implications, the limitations of this research and its methods are considered. As for theoretical and methodological restrictions, the research experienced a core controversy in securitisation theory (Balzacq, Léonard, & Ruzicka, 2016); to determine what the precise criteria are for adjudicating whether development is an instance of securitisation or an instance of politicisation. As discussed in the theoretical framework, an enabling audience needs to be identified and resonated with in order for a problem to become securitised. However, precise identification of the audience is challenging from an EU-perspective, especially when the securitising actor consists of multiple bodies and institutions. Hence, the solution of the research was to identify the EU Member States as the audience because their permission is required to pass the EU legislation. However, it would have been insightful to identify the audience more concretely, for instance, the citizens of the EU and the Member States.
A practical limitation concerns the availability of sources, in the sense that an insight into the disclosed documents of the EU on Search and Rescue would prove far more exciting results. The document analysed were all public documents, except one EU Report which was leaked by StateWatch. Public documents, like press releases, speeches, and statements, are sufficient and adequate to perform a discourse analysis. However, disclosed documents on the subject could give insights into the why underneath those public statements; and process-tracing could be extremely useful in uncovering the why if those documents were publicly available.

The research also raised further questions in need of investigation. The humanitarian narratives of the SAR operations were a valuable source of legitimacy. These narratives justified the existence of the EU SAR missions for the European public opinion and the cosmopolitan governments of the EU MSs. However, if the EU had conducted proactive SAR operations that fully matched the rhetoric employed, the support of the audience for these missions could also be undermined (Cusumano, 2019b). A suggestion on future research could be to investigate the ‘behind-the-scenes’ of why and how the EU avoided large-scale rescue operations, apart from the ‘pull factor’ argument. It could also be interesting to investigate the relations of power between the Member States with regards to their positions on SAR activities and how they lobby for their preferences in migration policies.

Further research could additionally look into a more profound process of securitisation within each separate SAR operations. A systematic examination of the public communication strategies as compared to the operational conduct for each mission could clarify the exact securitising mechanisms at hand. A combination of methods between content analysis for each published document on the respective operation with in-depth process-tracing could be a suitable method for this. If a precise causal mechanism is found within certain securitising moves, it will improve the generalisability and validity of the securitisation theories. It would additionally be interesting to investigate to what extent the securitising moves by the EU have affected the NGO SAR missions.

7.3 Final Reflections

During the time of writing this thesis, I was doing an internship at Shelter City Nijmegen. My tasks involved organising and managing the training, lobbying and networking programme of a human rights defender – Mary, an LGBT+ and women’s rights activist from Zimbabwe. Mary was a natural storyteller. During her stay, she was invited to speak at Africa Day in Amsterdam. She participated in a discussion panel on the importance of the international women’s movement and how women’s rights should and could be secured. This event took place a few weeks after Zimbabwe had suffered from cyclone Idai, one of the worst tropical cyclones on record to affect South-East Africa. Idai left 270,000 Zimbabweans
displaced and without food (Marima, 2019). Those in need of direct aid consisted mainly of women and children.

Mary told the audience how ‘the West’ aimed to help, aimed to secure the fundamental rights for the women. Primary needs, such as shelter and food, were required in the direct period after the cyclone. The aid providers needed to cooperate with locals in order to get these necessities at the correct place. In the case of a heavy militarized state like Zimbabwe, these locals were male soldiers who handled the logistics of the aid. In theory, the idea of shelter and food for those in need is a good idea, especially in cooperation with the local population. In practice, it meant that the women and children were located and concentrated in numbers at ‘hotspots’ that the soldiers guarded. Mary paused while she spoke, “now, my women are raped with a full stomach and a rooftop over their head – instead of hungry and in the bushes”.

Why am I telling this story? Because it illustrates the human desire and fundamental need for security. However, it also illustrates the consequences when the proposed security solutions lead to higher levels of insecurity. With regards to the current but also future migration crises, and with Search and Rescue activities, in particular, the objective of ‘saving lives’ could lead to new insecurity for those ‘to be saved’ lives when the circumstances are not carefully taken into consideration. Measures of security could be well-meant, but ultimately, they could also do more harm than good.

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24 Words from Mary, a human rights defender from Zimbabwe, during a discussion panel on Africa Day Amsterdam, 13 April 2019.
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## Appendix A: Primary Data Collection

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APPENDIX B: LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Mediterranean Sea Routes to Europe (UNHCR, 2015, p. 9).

Figure 2.1: Securitisation Spectrum (Emmers, 2013, p. 134).
Figure 3.1. The vocabulary of securitisation analysis (Balzacq 2011, p. 36).

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Figure 3.2. Securitisation analysis in context (Balzacq, 2011, p. 37).

Figure 4.1: Arrivals to Greece across Eastern Mediterranean Route, Jan-Dec 2015 (Crawley & et al., 2016a, p. 1).
Figure 4.2: Asylum application outcomes in Italy in 2015 (McMahon & Sigona, 2016, p. 15).

Figure 4.3: Refugee and migrant routes to Europe (n=122). (Crawley & et al., 2016b, p. 22)
Figure 5.1: Timeline of irregular migrant and refugee flows to Italy (crossing the Central Mediterranean), 2-11-2016 (EPSC, 2017, p. 2).