



# Mare Nostrum vs. Triton

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### **Title: Mare Nostrum vs. Triton**

**Abstract:** In 2013, the Italian Coast Guard commenced a search and rescue project, known as Operation Mare Nostrum, with the objective of providing humanitarian aid to migrants arriving on Italy's shores by sea. After a year, Mare Nostrum was terminated in November 2014 and replaced by the Frontex-led Operation Triton. (European Union External Action Services 2017). With an operating budget of less than a third of that of Operation Mare Nostrum and with a narrower patrol range that restricts its activities to Italian waters, Operation Triton has not achieved the same success rates in saving migrants' lives as did Mare Nostrum. This has left many wondering why the EU decided to replace Mare Nostrum with Triton. (Economist 2015). This research paper will endeavour to answer this question. It will examine the factors and reasoning behind the EU decision to replace Mare Nostrum with Operation Triton, and explore the differences between the two operations and how these differences may account for the seemingly poorer performance of Triton. The importance of this research is that understanding the EU's decision to replace Mare Nostrum with Operation Triton will allow for a better evaluation of Operation Triton.

### **Introduction**

In the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring, during the period between 2010 and 2013, an average of 28,000 migrants annually were reaching the shores of the EU from North Africa by way of the central route across the Mediterranean Sea. This number increased to 40,000 for 2013; and data for 2016 reports nearly 200,000 such migrants. Not surprisingly, as the number of migrants on the sea has increased over the first part of this decade, so too has the number of maritime mishaps that have resulted in loss of life.

In response to several tragedies that unfolded off its shores in late 2013, the Italian Coast Guard quickly launched a search and rescue project, named Operation Mare Nostrum (hereinafter referred to as Mare Nostrum). Its mandate was to proactively seek out those sea vessels carrying migrants that were sinking or capsizing, or in danger of doing so, and to provide all necessary humanitarian aid to save lives. After approximately one year, Mare Nostrum was

terminated In October 2014 and replaced by the broader Frontex-led initiative named Operation Triton. (European Union External Action Services 2017)

With an operating budget of less than one third of that of Mare Nostrum and with a narrower patrol range that restricts its activities to Italian waters, Operation Triton has not achieved the same level of success in saving the lives of migrants attempting a sea crossing to reach the shores of the EU as did Mare Nostrum. This has left many to wonder what was behind the EU's decision to establish Operation Triton rather than support Italy's Mare Nostrum initiative. (The Economist 2015)

### **The Issue**

This research paper provides a detailed description and examination of these two responses - Italy's Mare Nostrum and the EU's Operation Triton - to the Mediterranean migrant crisis, in terms of their origins, mandates, objectives, authorities, scope, limitations and other significant factors that account for the observed differences between these two initiatives, including the seemingly poorer performance of Operation Triton when it comes to saving migrant lives at sea.

Through its investigation of the differences between the two response operations and the key factors underlying those differences, this research paper advances our understanding of these two initiatives, contributes to a more accurate evaluation of Operation Triton itself, and helps to identify opportunities for improvements to the on-going Operation Triton as well as other similar schemes that may be established in the future.

### **Operation Mare Nostrum Sets Sail for A Year**

The origin of Mare Nostrum can be found in two shipwrecks at the bottom of the

Mediterranean Sea - the first occurring on October 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2013 off the coast of the Italian island of Lampedusa which resulted in the death of 368 migrants, with the second tragedy occurring only eight days later between Malta and Lampedusa bringing the death toll to more than 600 people (Musaro 2017).

Following the second incident, Italian authorities declared a national day of mourning to remember those tragically lost at sea. Images of the rows of coffins lined up in a Sicilian warehouse were widely disseminated across Italy and were greeted with great concern, leading Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta to take the decision to launch, only days later on October 18<sup>th</sup>, a humanitarian navy and coast guard operation on the Mediterranean Sea surrounding Italy (Musaro 2017). Dubbed Mare Nostrum (Latin for 'our sea' (Agnew 2015)), it was issued as an emergency search and rescue operation, and it received broad public support in Italy (Davies 2014).

Mare Nostrum had a narrow mandate with two primary objectives: to find and rescue migrants at risk of drowning on the Mediterranean Sea between Italy and North Africa; and, secondarily, to arrest and detain any smugglers of migrants that were identified during the course of those search and rescue operations (Ministero Della Difesa 2017). It was approached as, and viewed as, strictly a first-responder type of interim emergency operation. It had no avoidance/deterrence component aimed at preventing migrants from getting into dangerous situations at sea; and, once rescued, migrants were turned over to the existing channels and programs for dealing with asylum seekers. The Italian government has consistently portrayed Mare Nostrum as an emergency humanitarian search and rescue operation aimed at dealing with the sudden and dramatic increase in migration flows in the Strait of Sicily (Scherer & Di Giorgio

2014).

With Mare Nostrum, the Italian navy patrolled a 70,000 square kilometre swath of the Mediterranean Sea (Davies 2014), an area that encompassed the search and rescue zones of Libya and Malta as well as Italy (European Political Strategy Centre 2017). Assets at its disposal included seven vessels (five ships and two submarines), six aircraft (five planes and one helicopter) and 900 military personnel (Davies 2014), with both components of the operation (sea and air) under the command of a navy admiral stationed on a flagship that served as the command and control platform (Ministero Della Difesa 2017).

The personnel involved in Mare Nostrum included individuals from the public security department, the central directorate for immigration, and border police. This diversity of expertise among the participating personnel was seen as having contributed positively to on-board migrant identification procedures. Additionally, all migrants were subjected to medical checks aboard the rescue vessels performed by doctors associated with the border health department, the Italian Red Cross, Francesca Rava Foundation, or the Italian relief corps. (Ministero Della Difesa 2017)

Mare Nostrum carried out 421 missions during the period between October 18<sup>th</sup> 2013 and its last day of operation on October 31<sup>st</sup> 2014 (Davies 2014), in which more than 100,250 migrants were rescued by Mare Nostrum, while more than 3,300 other migrants died at sea attempting to cross the Mediterranean during this same interval (Scherer & Di Giorgio 2014). Additionally, 500 human traffickers were apprehended (Association Europeenne pour la defense des Droits de l'Homme 2017).

While the Italian government initially estimated the cost of Mare Nostrum at 1.5 million Euros per month, the actual cost was far higher coming in at approximately 9 million Euros per

month (Association Europeenne pour la defense des Droits de l'Homme 2017).

Thus, although seen as an effective search and rescue operation, the cost of maintaining Mare Nostrum became too great for the Italian government to carry alone; it viewed Italy as unfairly shouldering the burdensome cost of this mission for all EU member states. This led to Italy's decision to terminate Mare Nostrum on October 31<sup>st</sup> 2014 and return to regular operations, while its previously wider role was turned over to the Frontex Plus initiative named Operation Triton and discussed later in this paper. The Italian coast guard continues to carry out search and rescue activities; however, only in Italian waters and only at the scale that existed prior to the 2013 Lampedusa shipwrecks. Currently, Italy's coast guard accounts for 26% of all migrant rescues in the Mediterranean Sea (European Political Strategy Centre 2017). (Ministero Della Difesa 2017)

Mare Nostrum was not the only coast guard or search and rescue operation plying the waters of the Mediterranean Sea during its year of operation. It functioned alongside various other Frontex activities which are discussed later in this paper under the Operation Triton headings.

### **Prevailing Views About Mare Nostrum**

In terms fulfilling its primary objective of saving migrant lives, Mare Nostrum consistently been portrayed as a success by both Italian and EU officials. Even its secondary objective of arresting those responsible for smuggling migrants has been given a passing grade. (Association Europeenne pour la defense des Droits de l'Homme 2017)

The only concern or controversy swirling around Mare Nostrum has been its possible unintended consequence - to what extent, if any, did it function as a pull factor?

The year 2014, when Mare Nostrum was operating, saw a large increase in the number of migrants using the Mediterranean Sea to reach the EU's borders; and led many, including EU member states, to point to Mare Nostrum as being a pull factor (Davies 2014). This notion -- which argues that, as prospective migrants came to believe that the crossing has become less risky because they would be saved by Mare Nostrum, more of them have embarked on the crossing -- continues to be widely and sharply debated, even as the numbers of migrants using the Mediterranean Sea route has continued to increase each year after Mare Nostrum ceased operation. (Association Europeenne pour la defense des Droits de l'Homme 2017)

Among those taking the pull factor position are those who hold the view that Mare Nostrum, and other search and rescue operations, have served as a pull factor for migrants who do not qualify for international protection to enter the EU illegally. They argue that a significant portion of the asylum seekers using the central Mediterranean route are in fact economic migrants. (European Political Strategy Centre 2017)

Others place less stock on the pull factor of Mare Nostrum, arguing that the majority of asylum seeking migrants reaching the EU via the central Mediterranean route are Eritreans, Libyans, Palestinians, or Syrians. These voices attribute the increasing numbers of migrant crossings to international circumstances and the worsening situations in their homelands. (Association Europeenne pour la defense des Droits de l'Homme 2017)

### **Frontex**

Established in 2004, and mandated and operating under the current EU Commission Regulation (EU) 2016/1624, Frontex is the EU's border control agency. Article One states that its primary objective is the development and implementation of a European integrated border

management system at the Union level, considered to be necessary for the free movement of persons and a fundamental component of an area of freedom and security. The aim of Frontex is to manage external EU borders efficiently and address “migratory challenges and potential future threats at those borders”(EU Commission Regulation 2016/1624 , pp 251/2), while at the same time still placing a premium on the free movement of persons within the Union. The Regulation highlights that member states retain primary responsibility for the management of their external borders in both their individual interests and in the interests of all member states in the Union. The article outlines the Frontex role as one that should “support the application of Union measures relating to the management of the external border by reinforcing, accessing, and coordinating actions of member states which implement those measures” (EU Commission Regulation 2016/1624, pp 251/2). The regulation states that, in carrying out its duties, Frontex should have regard for law and order and the safeguarding of internal security (EU Commission Regulation 2016/1624, pp 251/7). (EU Commission, Regulation 2016/1624, pp 251/2)

In implementing and performing this mandate, Frontex has developed into a “European institution aimed at coordinating the monitoring and control of the sea, land, and air external borders of EU member states, as well as implementing readmission agreements with neighbouring countries concerning non-EU migrants rejected at the borders” (Ministero Della Difesa 2017).

Although not specifically addressed in the regulation, Frontex has other roles and responsibilities that include providing assistance to persons in distress and assisting member states in circumstances where they require technical assistance at their external borders (Eurlex 2016). While Frontex makes it clear that it is not a search and rescue body, nor is it a

coordination centre for search and rescue activities, it does acknowledge its duty to assist member states in fulfilling their international obligations under maritime law to aid persons and vessels in distress (European Commission 2014). Under the UN Search and Rescue Convention, states are obliged to “ensure that assistance be provided to any person in distress at sea.....regardless of the nationality or status of such a person or the circumstances in which that person is found” and to “provide for their initial medical or other needs, and deliver them to a place of safety” (UNHCR 2014). Frontex must comply with these obligations just as any other sea vessel must. (UNHCR 2014)

### **Operation Triton**

It is within this framework of mandates and obligations, that Frontex was brought into the Mediterranean migrant crisis in mid-2014. On August 27<sup>th</sup> 2014, following a meeting between Italian Interior Minister, Angelino Alfano, and the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malström, it was announced that a new program named Frontex Plus (later renamed Operation Triton) would be established in November of that year. Frontex Plus would encompass two existing small-scale Frontex border patrol operations in the Mediterranean Sea (Hermes and Aeneas), which would be merged and extended as a response to the pending cessation of Mare Nostrum. (Association Europeenne pour la defense des Droits de l’Homme 2017)

Frontex commenced its coordination of Operation Triton on October 31<sup>st</sup> 2014. From the outset, the objectives of Operation Triton were: first and foremost, to coordinate EU border patrol activities in the Mediterranean and provide operational assistance to Italy in carrying out maritime border patrol and survey operations in the region; and, secondarily, to fulfill EU obligations to carry out search and rescue operations whenever circumstances demanded (i.e.

when vessels in distress were reported to it, or encountered during its border patrol activities), but not to proactively seek out such vessels. (European Political Strategy Centre 2017)

During its first nine months, Operation Triton's work with the Italian coast guard was focused much more on border protection than on search and rescue missions. The July 2015 expansion of its fleet size and relocation southward in the Strait of Sicily, where it operated mainly in the Maltese search and rescue area, led to increased involvement in search and rescue operations. While its mandate was expanded to include search and rescue operations, Operation Triton continues to place a premium on border control, monitoring and surveillance. Furthermore, its area of operation remains limited to European waters. (European Political Strategy Centre 2017)

Operation Triton has a budget of 2.9 million Euros per month (Davies 2014), and its assets currently consist of 12 coast guard ships (9 Italian and 3 Maltese), 10 other sea vessels provided by other EU and non-EU states, and 3 aircraft (2 helicopters from the UK and one plane from Finland). Because the EU does not have border patrol aircraft, ships, or personnel of its own, it must rely on member (and sometimes non-member) states to supply these types of resources. No information was made available regarding the number of personnel that have been assigned to Operation Triton, nor the nature of medical and customs officers that are on board during search and rescue operations. (European Political Strategy Centre 2017)

Operation Triton was involved 13% of the search and rescue operations carried out in the Mediterranean in 2016 and participated in the rescue of 4,480 migrants during 2016. In the same year, 4,579 migrants were either found dead or were reported missing in the Mediterranean Sea, and a total of 181,436 migrants reached the EU using the Mediterranean route. (European

Political Strategy Centre 2017)

### **Prevailing Views about Operation Triton**

Beginning with the announcement of its creation, Operation Triton has faced significant criticism from various experts and NGO's who argued that this move could have "fatal consequences" (Agnew 2015). Its critics have included former Italian Minister for Integration, Cecile Kynege, who stated that Operation Triton would be much less effective at search and rescue than Mare Nostrum, citing its initially smaller fleet size, its relatively small budget at approximately one third of that of Mare Nostrum, and the reduced size of its search and rescue area, all of which would lead to more fatalities (presumably because fewer boats and fewer personnel would reach fewer vessels in distress in time to effect a rescue) (Agnew 2015).

Various NGO's argued that, because Operation Triton was never intended to serve as a replacement for the comprehensive search and rescue operation that was Mare Nostrum, and because it lacked strong links to other search and rescue operations, there would be a greater death toll (Davis 2014). There is evidence that the predictions of these NGO's and experts may have been correct - Operation Triton has carried out significantly fewer rescues annually than did Mare Nostrum; and the death toll in the Mediterranean has increased, albeit alongside the number of migrants crossing its waters to reach EU shores (Scherer & Di Giorgio 2014).

### **Key Differences Between Mare Nostrum and Operation Triton**

a) Mandate: Mare Nostrum had a simple and clear mandate given to it by a single master, the Italian government. It was to be a search and rescue operation in Italian waters, in the waters of other nations, or in international waters, no matter; and it would bring the smugglers and traffickers of migrants to "justice". Whereas Operation Triton had a much more complex and

somewhat ambiguous mandate given to it by many masters (the EU and 28 member states). It was to remain focused on EU border control and security, which confined its operations to European waters; it was to support the activities of the Italian coast guard; and its participation in search and rescue activities was a secondary role, largely there to fulfill international obligations. Furthermore, it was a shifting mandate as, over time, it moved to increase its involvement in search and rescue in the Maltese zone, although its primary mandate has remained EU border security at sea.

The names chosen for the two operations evoke very different images that speak to their very different mandates. Mare Nostrum means ‘our sea’. An apt name for the approach taken by this operation. It worked within a large search and rescue zone without borders, seeing the need for a humanitarian response beyond the traditional Italian waters search and rescue zone. Triton brings to mind the image of the armed mythological Greek god who controlled the tides of the Aegean sea. Mare Nostrum sees the Mediterranean Sea and what happens on it as a shared responsibility, whereas Triton views it from the perspective of the Greek god who is in control of its waters. (Paradiso 2016)

b) Resources: Significant differences can be seen in the resources available to the two operations to carry out their mandates. Mare Nostrum operated on a budget of 9 million Euro per month, whereas Operation Triton has functioned on 2.9 million Euro per month. Mare covered a significantly larger patrol area with a smaller fleet of assets (7 sea vessels and 6 aircraft), while Operation Triton runs a larger fleet of assets (22 sea vessels and 3 aircraft) over a smaller patrol area. The differences in mandates and how those are reflected in the deployment of hard assets and personnel may explain these differences.

c) Outcomes: There is abundant evidence to indicate that Mare Nostrum fulfilled its rather simple and straightforward mandate. More than 100,000 migrants were rescued and approximately 500 human smugglers were apprehended in its year of operation. Gauging the outcomes for Operation Triton is murkier given its quite different and more complex mandate. Even then, there is some evidence to suggest that it has fallen short. When it comes to securing EU borders, the number of migrants reaching the EU via the Mediterranean route have steadily increased each year, with more than 180,000 such arrivals in 2016. The number of rescues executed by Operation Triton remains low at less than 5,000 migrants in 2016. Even in areas related to its core mandate of border control, such as human smuggling and trafficking, Frontex as a whole made only 500 arrests for human and drug smuggling/trafficking and 13 arrests for illegal fishing in 2016 (Frontex 2016), which are not impressive numbers compared to those of Mare Nostrum where this activity was a secondary objective.

d) Critiques: Both operations faced harsh criticism from various quarters. EU member states were critical of Mare Nostrum, seeing it as creating a pull factor for increased migration activity. While Operation Triton was criticized by NGO's and some politicians for providing an inadequate response to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Mediterranean that would lead to more deaths at sea.

Despite the abundance of evidence pointing to the very different nature of these two operations, particularly in respect of their mandates and resources, one aspect of the public critique of them is puzzling -- why have so many news outlets, and even scholars, framed Operation Triton as a replacement for Mare Nostrum? From the outset of the former, Frontex stated that it was not intended to replace Mare Nostrum. Perhaps, the answer lies in their

commonalities - both operations were an EU response, and both sought to provide an answer to the same crisis. Faced with a large increase in migrants using the Mediterranean route and dying in its waters, Italy responded in one way, with a short-term large-scale search and rescue mission. Faced with the same issue, the EU responded a different way, with increased border control activities. Which brings one back to the question: why did the EU choose to respond to the Mediterranean crisis with Operation Triton rather than support Mare Nostrum or initiate a comparable search and rescue mission.

### **Behind the EU Decision to Establish Operation Triton**

One wonders what occurred during those 2015 summer meetings between EU and Italian officials that led to the subsequent unveiling of Operation Triton. Why did the EU not simply elect to provide financial support to Mare Nostrum, which was functioning reasonably well and recording considerable success in saving lives? Why did the EU, in the midst of the Mediterranean migration crisis, choose instead to establish its own response to the crisis? Even in the summer of 2014, before the Lampedusa shipwrecks and before the full brunt of the migrant crisis hit the continent during the summer and autumn of 2015, EU member states began putting the brakes on migrants entering their states. Many countries in southern Europe were still reeling from the Euro crisis at a time when migrant numbers were steadily increasing. A significant number of EU members, among them some that had been seen in the past as having open and generous systems towards refugees, were closing their doors as the cost and logistics of processing and integrating the many migrants coming to their doors became ever more daunting. This development coincided with the EU's recent failure to renegotiate a set of common EU asylum policies among member states, which left the EU with few options as to what the

‘European‘ approach to asylum seekers should consist of. (Trauner 2016)

Additionally, in 2014, many southern European countries no longer adhered to the Dublin regulations, allowing migrants to travel onwards to other EU states without processing them in the first country of arrival. Not only were countries in the south shirking their Dublin obligations, Germany was accepting asylum seekers who had first entered other EU countries. Germany had begun doing this with those who had arrived in Greece in 2014, as Greece was seen as not meeting the basic requirements for refugees (Knight 2017), and, in 2015, began accepting any individuals coming from Syria (Noack 2016). (Trauner 2016)

As existing migrant policies were failing and/or not being properly implemented, the EU stepped in and provided monetary and organizational support to those countries facing large increases in migrants - funding for the processing of migrants and financial aid to support them, and organizational support from Frontex, including initiatives like Operation Triton. Simply stated, by 2014, the only tools available to the EU with which to respond to the increase in migrants were Frontex or injections of cash. (Trauner 2016)

The EU decision to embark upon Operation Triton, rather than pursue a co-funding arrangement for Mare Nostrum, can best be explained by the EU’s need to have the support of its member states when it comes to budgets and projects.

As previously stated, several EU member states, most notably the UK, were opposed to Mare Nostrum because they viewed it as a pull factor bringing economic migrants to Europe. With some EU member states opposing a full-scale humanitarian solution in the Mediterranean, it was quickly apparent to the EU that, for its approach to be acceptable to its members, it could not be a strictly search and rescue mission like that of the Italian coast guard.

Secondly, the budget for Frontex must be approved by the EU parliament; and the EU is not permitted to run a deficit. Currently, the EU Parliament is becoming increasingly populated by right-wing populists and euro-skeptics who are vocal about closing off avenues for migrants to enter Europe. This situation makes the approval of a budget that includes a large-scale search and rescue operation for migrants rather unlikely. (European Commission, Budget 2016)

Given these dynamics, the EU decided that controlling the EU border and reducing the flow of irregular migrants would be its political priority, an approach consistent with the notion that the EU, together with its member states, must demonstrate effective border control against the “ruthless networks which exploit migrants” (European Political Strategy Centre 2017). In making this decision, the EU conceded that any measures taken in respect of border control must adhere to the principles of respect for human life and dignity and conform with European values. Nevertheless, priority would be given to securing EU borders.

The EU’s decision to focus on border control rather than on search and rescue can best be explained by the absence of sufficient political will among its member states to push for a large-scale humanitarian effort, as well as by the increasing fragmentation of the EU in relation to a common EU asylum system. In the absence of other viable options, the EU chose a Frontex-led initiative focused around border patrol as its response to the migration crisis in the Mediterranean.

### **How Best to Move Forward**

In the wake of the Operation Triton versus Mare Nostrum decision, how does the EU move forward from here? For a Union that prides itself on its shared values and reverence for human rights, the Mediterranean migrant crisis is a dark stain. Thousands of human beings have

died at the Europe's shores. The EU has made it clear that a strategy consisting solely of a humanitarian response is not an option. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for improvements that could reduce the number of lives lost at sea on the Mediterranean route that would likely be supported by EU member states.

One option has already been undertaken by the EU in relation to migration from Turkey, the EU-Turkey agreement. Similar agreements could be negotiated with Libya and possibly Egypt, wherein asylum cases would be processed in UNHCR camps located in one or both of these countries, with their tighter exit patrols and border controls. Frontex has already been working with the Libyan coast guard on capacity building there to improve its patrol of Libya's coast for irregular migrants embarking on the dangerous voyage from Libya to the EU.

(European Political Strategy Centre 2017)

The difficulty with this option is that both Egypt and Libya have dubious human rights record, especially in relation to migrants, with the potential for major human rights violations by these countries. The backlash that the EU has faced from NGO's and civil rights groups in relation to the EU-Turkey arrangement offers a clear indication of how similar agreements would be severely criticized. There are well documented cases of Libyan citizen and border agents incarcerating irregular migrants with no trial or release date. Furthermore, having these countries holding large numbers of migrant whose desired destination is Europe, could facilitate the 'weaponization' of the migrants by these governments. For instance, President Recep Erdogan of Turkey is seen as having a hold over the EU through the fear that he could 'unleash' large numbers of migrants and asylum seekers if the EU criticizes him or otherwise displeases him. Allowing states such as Libya and Egypt to gain this type of leverage over the EU would

exacerbate the damage that this migrant crisis has already done to perceptions of the morality of the EU.

Another option is to increase EU efforts to address the situations that exist in the countries of origin and endeavour to ameliorate them so that the residents would feel less need to flee these areas. The EU already runs partnership and development funds in several migrant-sending countries around the world, those facing civil war as well as those that are severely economically depressed. If the EU were to use the instruments it has at its disposal and proactively respond to both positive and negative developments in these areas, it could lessen the number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean. (European Political Strategy Centre 2017)

The difficulty with this option is that it is the most challenging. Addressing root causes has been an EU policy goal for many years; however, the follow through has often been absent and its effectiveness varied. And, addressing root causes is only one part of any solution because its impact are almost always only seen and felt in the long-term. Thus, this option should only ever be one component of an EU approach to addressing irregular migrants and asylum seekers coming to the EU. (European Political Strategy Centre 2017)

A final option would be for the EU to expand the activities of processing centres in hotspots and return migrants who fail to meet a refugee or subsidiary status. This could be achieved through both monetary and operational assistance from the EU, which would be seen as managing migration and could thus get approval from the EU Parliament and member states. This would allow the EU and member states to regain control of their borders and deter potential economic migrants who would see their prospects for remaining in the EU diminished. This would also allow for a stronger argument to be made to extend search and rescue as Europe

would have the capacity to handle a large influx of migrants in hotspots. (European Political Strategy Centre 2017)

Two major difficulties with this option are that, up to this point, the EU has failed to integrate a relocation service for refugees in Europe. Without this type of relocation mechanism, hotspots such as Italy, Greece, and Spain will consistently be overburdened by migrants. Secondly, there is currently a lack of return policies for migrant who do not meet refugee or subsidiary protection. For this policy option to work, the EU would first have to greatly improve its return policies prior to scaling up any type of processing. Although this option has flaws, it would be the most beneficial to all parties concerned, member states, EU institutions, and migrants. Member states, especially those situated in hotspots areas, are given both operational and economic support to process migrants. A strengthening of return policies would allow the EU and members states to present the appearance of having regained control of their borders, and would weaken the arguments of the far-right that the asylum process is being abused and proper processing is not occurring. Finally, it would allow the EU to pursue search and rescue operations because it would now be able to process and relocate refugees, resulting in the saving of migrant lives.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the EU's decision to implement Operation Triton after Italy decided to terminate Operation Mare Nostrum. In doing so, it described the Mare Nostrum operation carried out by the Italian government in 2013-2014, the circumstances that led to its creation, its objectives and operations, the success it had in meeting those objectives, and the backlash it received from the EU community. The directives under which Frontex operates were

described, as well as its mandate and obligations under international maritime law. The creation of Operation Triton and its complex mandate are described, together with its operational activities and their outcomes and the criticisms it received. The paper then explored the key differences between these two operations.

From this investigation, the paper traced how the EU came to the decision to go with Operation Triton as its response to the Mediterranean migration crisis; and identified the lack of sufficient political will on the part of EU member states, the EU's budgetary and project processes, and the fragmentation of EU when it comes to achieving a common asylum policy as the primary reasons behind the creation of Operation Triton instead of support being given to extend Mare Nostrum. The paper concluded with a discussion of three broad policy options that could be pursued in an effort to reduce the loss of life in the Mediterranean that could be structured in a way that would still receive the support of EU member states.

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