The EU and the Migration Crisis in the Mediterranean: Border control and human (in)security

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Outline

The European Union (EU) is facing unprecedented irregular migratory flows coming across the Mediterranean Sea. Since 2011 the number of migrants smuggled to the EU via Mediterranean routes has consistently increased and the number of dead and missing persons on maritime routes have dramatically risen as well.

Following the dramatic shipwrecks of April 2015, the EU tried to launch a new EU migration governance bringing EU member states to adopt a common position encouraged by the principle of solidarity and responsibility which are expressed in EU treaties and are at the basis of the humanitarian approach. EU institutions such as the High Representative for the Union of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission call upon the human protection and the 'duty to intervene'. However, some EU member states insist on the need to close the borders to guarantee the EU external borders' protection and reject EU instruments such as the quota system, while the European Council is unable to ensure the implementation of these EU tools.

The EU is almost paralysed by diverging interests, thus lacks consistent approach(es) to address the Mediterranean migration crisis. Although a humanitarian approach is practiced on the ground via SAR operations by state and non-state actors, the EU is still entrapped in the intergovernmental logics dominated by EU member states keen of protecting their own borders, uninterested in providing human protection to people in distress.

By looking at the different narratives and approaches emerged at EU level, we can claim that the EU migration governance is characterized by a pendulum stance, swinging from duty to protect human beings to fencing Europe. The controversial stances taken by EU institutions, European state and non-state actors, prevail and overwhelm human protection provided by a panoply of actors with different priorities, strategies and approaches.

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