



Lampedusa: The World on an Island

Analyses, facts, projects

Report published by the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI)

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This document contains figures, analyses and the first report on the Mediterranean Hope Project (MH), which was launched in 2014 by the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI) with the funding from the 8 ‰ ('eight per mille') of Italian income tax revenue assigned to the Methodist and Waldensian Churches.

The document was published in Italian and also in English to make it accessible to FCEI international partners and their member churches. Being a dossier, it contains different materials, that are not always homogeneous but that might be useful to share an analysis of the framework in which the project has been developed. Through these pages, we would like also to give an account of the project's creation, its objectives and its first steps.

In addition, the Report contains an appeal to the Italian Protestant Churches and their international partners. The MH project is the testimony of Protestant Christians who have responded to the challenge of renewing their commitment towards thousands of migrants, our Mediterranean neighbours, who are knocking on our door, by offering them a shelter, solidarity and integration. We commit ourselves to provide an answer consistent with the gospel and the spirit of solidarity.



1. A project in the Mediterranean

In this paragraph, we reproduce the transcript of a general presentation of the MH project that took place on 10 February 2014.

Cowardice asks the question, is it safe?

Expediency ask the question, is it politic?

Vanity asks the question, is it popular?

But conscience ask the question, is it right? And there comes a time when we must take a position (that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it) because it is right."

Martin Luther King

Facts

According to Fortress Europe, the online Observatory on the victims of immigration, at least 19,142 people have died along the southern boundaries of Europe from 1988 to date.

In this period, there have been 6,835 victims and 5,262 have gone missing in the stretch of sea between the Strait of Sicily and the Maghreb coasts. At least 705 people have lost their lives (314 are missing) in the Adriatic Sea, between the Balkans and Puglia, and in the Ionian Sea, between Greece and Calabria.

In 2011, 60,000 fled to Italy from the Arab Spring.

Between January 2010 and the end of 2012 there were 3,315 recorded victims

From January to July 2013, about 8,400, among them migrants and refugees, reached the coasts of Italy and Malta.

Over the last few years, every day at least one person has died in the attempt to reach Italy by sea.

On 3 October 2013, 366 migrants from Eritrea died a few metres from the beaches of Lampedusa.

Causes

The number of migrants trying to reach the coasts of Italy by sea is increasing for a number of reasons:

- Increasing levels of infighting in the countries of North Africa
- The crisis in West Africa (Nigeria)
- The longstanding development problems in Sub-Saharan Africa
- The uncertain results of the Arab Spring
- Human trafficking
- The lack of a legal way to immigrate to Italy

Forecasts

It is difficult to conceive a solution to this phenomenon in the short term; on the other hand, it is easy to foresee that the number of irregular immigrants coming ashore will increase during the summer. Without significant changes, we expect this trend to go on and increase.

We can also expect that, without a new law concerning refugees and asylum-seekers, Italy is likely to be just a crossing point.

Finally, given the economic, social and political framework of other countries in the Northern Mediterranean area, Italy is likely to become the destination for a higher number of immigrants arriving by sea.

The routes of human trafficking are not predictable and Lampedusa may not remain the main entry gate. However, the island will retain a symbolic value as a "gateway" on the border between the Global North and South. As for refugee camps, we expect the demand to remain high, given the structural lack of available places.

The Project

The Mediterranean Hope project aims to contribute to addressing the humanitarian emergency connected to irregular migration by sea. This project, which is planned to last one year and to be renewed after assessing its efficacy, provides for:

- **The Observatory in Lampedusa.** This is the most innovative and original part of the project. It is meant to act as a point to gather information and data but also as a centre to promote the culture of

hospitality and human rights; thus it will be also effective in case of a lowered number of arrivals. Hence the importance of a network to be developed in three directions:

- o Infonetwork, for participatory information based on the current framework of migration flows in the Mediterranean area.
- o Politically, the idea is to create a pressure group acting on Local Entities (national and local authorities, municipalities, Italian and European parliaments) to denounce the human right violations and to request new regulations concerning irregular immigration and shelter services for the refugees and asylum-seekers.
- o Ecumenically, both with the Protestant churches abroad and the Catholic Church, to promote a common national and international commitment to sustain the fundamental rights of migrants and asylum-seekers.

In this perspective, the Observatory will handle

- 1) relations with local, regional and national authorities
 - 2) relations with the local population
 - 3) relations with local, regional and national voluntary groups
 - 4) information and news about the arrivals and the conditions of irregular immigrant workers
 - 5) participation, wherever possible, in first aid and rescue operations
 - 6) management of the procedure for giving refugees shelter in the churches' network of centres (see below)
 - 7) creation of national networks for sharing information, providing second shelters, promoting political mobilisation and cultural awareness.
- **Camp/camps in south-eastern Sicily.** An assessment will be carried out at Scicli, in order to create a network with the Protestant congregations and other voluntary support groups in the area.

Each centre consists of a farmhouse, usually rented and refurbished in order to accommodate 30 to 40 migrants and a staff of at least 5 people (including both permanent personnel and voluntary workers). The centre is considered as 'first shelter' accommodation, which means that it is intended for migrants in need of temporary accommodation sent by the local authority. There might also be undocumented migrants without accommodation, but it is important to clarify right now that the centres will be managed within the law and it is important to establish how they will liaise with the security forces. The centres will rely on cultural mediators who will "track" the immigrants' road maps, collect information and transfer them to the Observatory. Moreover the Centre will offer Basic Italian courses and other activities while trying to connect with external "terminals" through which it can rapidly transfer the migrants. A legal advice service will also be available and provided by professionals both on a voluntary basis and for payment. In particular, this service will provide support for submitting applications for asylum and other legal actions.

A key role will be played by volunteers providing their services for no less than two weeks, with reimbursement for travel and subsistence expenses.

This project will rely on volunteers from all over the world, recruited through international ecumenical channels as far as possible: Lampedusa must become a global symbol of our commitment to life and justice.

10 February 2014

2. Fortress Europe

*We would not like to see this Europe as a fortress of rich countries, focused on defending their positions on the global market, and maybe able to allocate some financial resources for international cooperation but not prepared to accept workers from developing countries and not concerned about the tragedy of those who are escaping from starvation, persecution and wars.*¹

We wrote these words in 1989 in an essay published by the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, entitled significantly “Casa o Fortezza?” (Home or Fortress?). The topic was the immigration policies in Italy and Europe. In those years, immigration flows were much more significant than nowadays and Europe was starting to think how to contain them. Central and northern European countries were greatly concerned by the “southern border”, which was considered as a dangerous hub for thousands of migrants who wanted to reach Germany or the Netherlands. And for this reason, the principle of freedom of movement recognised at Schengen in 1985 was initially applied only to France, Germany and Benelux. The enlargement of the Schengen area was the result of the pressure applied by the states excluded from the initial phase of the treaty. From the beginning of the 1990s, those countries wanted a complete recognition of their European status and of the checks they were carrying out on European borders.



The Schengen policy, which is positive and effective at the continental level, has had serious effects at international level as it has imposed on its member countries (31 in 2014) drastic policies to close the borders and thus strict measures to counter the flow of non-European immigration. The “fortress” became stronger and progressively withdrew into itself, thinking that raising the drawbridge and shutting the front gate was enough to eliminate excess immigration.

This policy is simple and convenient for the European countries that have already absorbed a considerable workforce to compensate for their demographic decline. But it is harder for the countries exposed to irregular immigration and still interested in acquiring workers for at least some sectors of their production

¹ Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy , *Casa o fortezza? L'Italia, l'Europa del 1992 e l'immigrazione. Quali scelte politiche?* Claudiana 1989

system. This is Italy's great paradox. Since the mid-1970s,² when the number of Italy's immigrants exceeded the Italians migrating abroad, the Italian political debate was influenced by the ideological prejudice that the economic structure of the country was incompatible with immigration and the integration of workers coming from other countries. An impartial analysis, not compromised by the agenda of the political parties which have built their fortunes on the immigration alarm, tells us the contrary.

Different analyses³ agree that immigrants represent 7.5% of Italy's total workforce and proportionally they work more than the Italians in some sectors, notably in hospitality, manufacturing and the building industry, that now heavily rely on them. Italy, as Ambrosini explained (2010), has adopted a model where immigration is either welcomed or rejected. On the one hand, it is functional to covering the demand for labour for jobs that Italians are not willing to undertake anymore; on the other, it is unable to define a set of measures to favour integration and social inclusion. The result is an uncertain and unpredictable framework of rights, which is exposed to the whims of a public opinion shaped by recurring campaigns of social alarm that some parties have launched to build their consensus.

However, over the past years the immigration flows traditionally directed towards Italy have stabilized, with immigrants representing 7-8% of Italy's population, in line with other European countries.⁴

3. A new kind of immigration

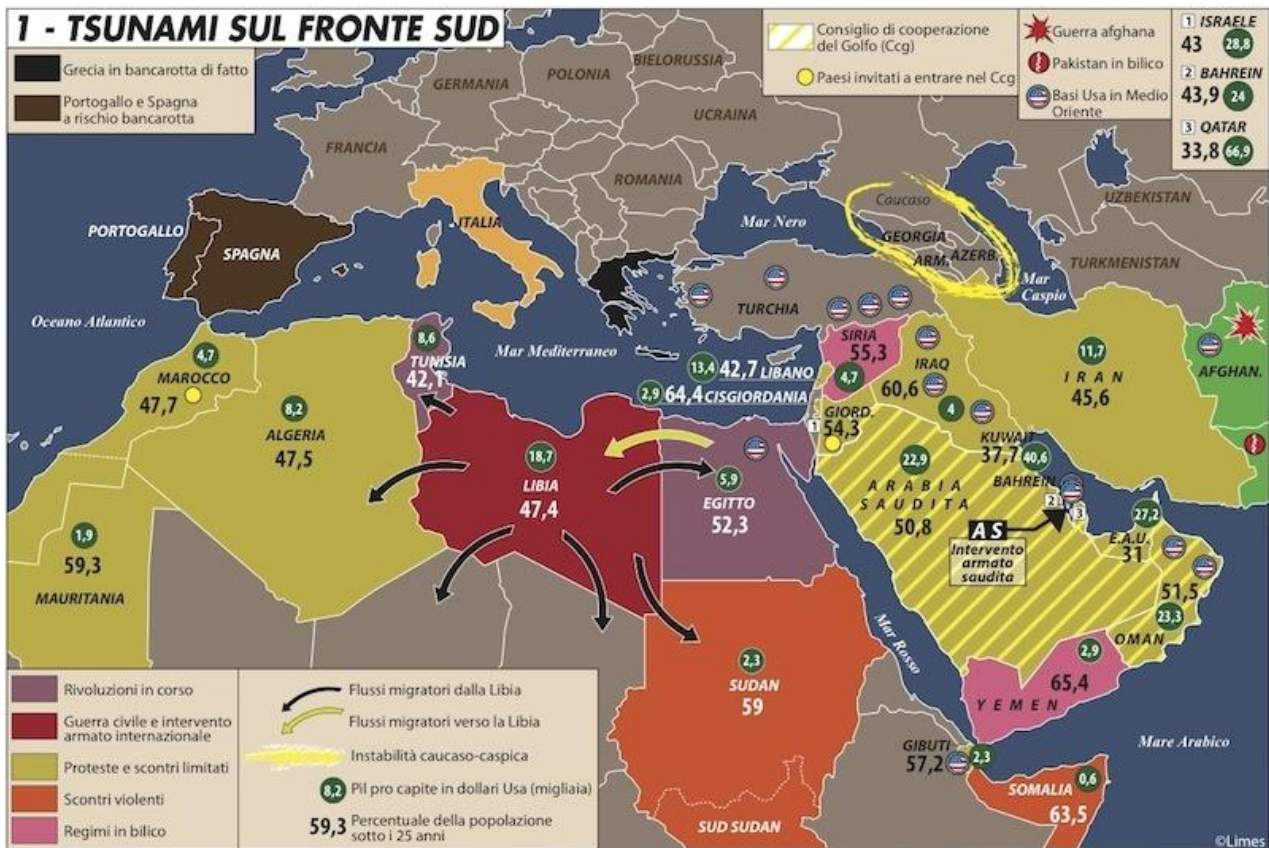
The sudden and unexpected new phenomenon in this context is the destabilising geopolitical process in North and Sub-Saharan Africa that has given rise to immigration flows different in nature and following new patterns compared to the previous ones. The "state failure" in Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Iraq, the uncertain results of the Arab Spring in Libya, Egypt and Syria, as well as the persisting of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria, Mali and Sudan are push factors which drive thousands of people out of their countries towards destinations which are not always clear and defined. These factors have worsened the endemic crisis owing to desertification and the drastic loss of primary resources. Migrants leaving for Lampedusa, often after wandering through North Africa countries for months or even years, testify to this new phenomenon that we must take into consideration.

The map below, developed by the periodical *Limes*, describes the destabilisation and the conflicts which determined intra-Africa migration flows. *Limes* calls it a "tsunami", whose effects are necessarily extending towards the Mediterranean area by involving, directly or indirectly, Italy and Europe.

² Luca Einaudi, *Le politiche dell'immigrazione in Italia dall'unità a oggi*, Laterza 2007, from p. 85

³ Maurizio Ambrosini, *Richiesti e respinti*, Il Saggiatore 2010; Enrico Pugliese, *L'Italia tra migrazioni interne e migrazioni internazionali*, Il Mulino 2006; Maria Immacolata Macioti and Enrico Pugliese, *L'immigrazione in Italia*, Laterza 1998

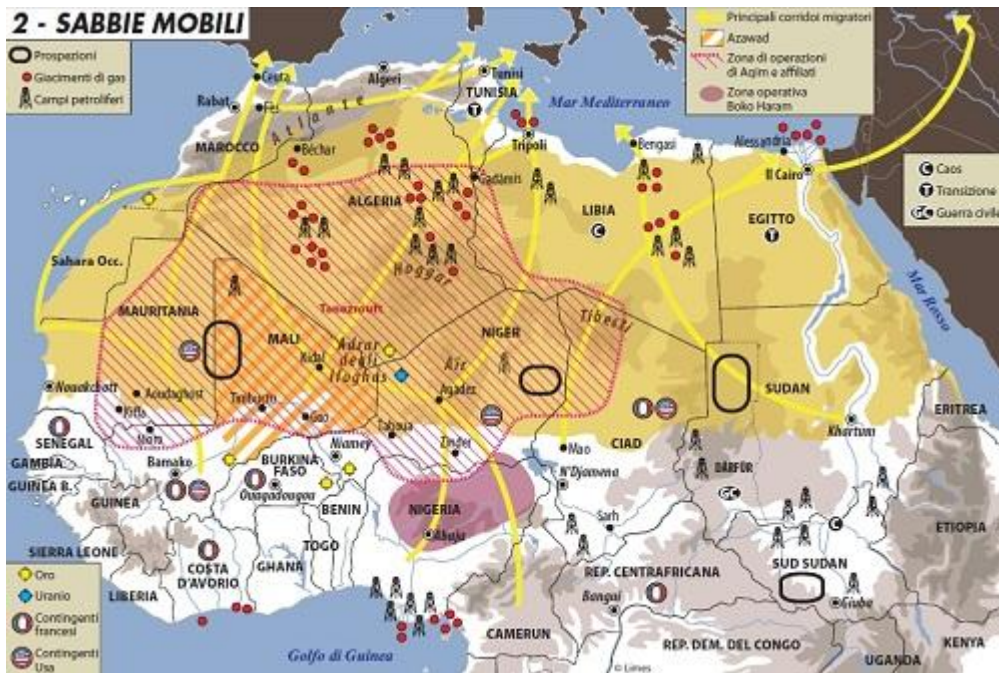
⁴ Caritas e Migrantes, *XXIII Rapporto Immigrazione*, 2013



Source: Limes, rivista di geopolitica 3/2011

Over the past two/three years the scenario has become more confused due to the Sub-Saharan conflicts involving a vast area extending from Senegal to Eritrea, and including countries such as Mali and Sudan. In this framework, Boko Haram's military and terrorist activism in Nigeria is just one of the issues at stake.

The map here below, also developed by Limes, illustrates the corridors that push "Lampedusa's" migrants to leave the conflict areas for Europe. In addition, by indicating oil and gas fields, the map highlights "what is at stake" in the conflict areas where opposing parties often use the banner of religious ideologies.



Source. *Limes, rivista di Geopolitica*

4. The nonexistent invasion

“Arrivals in Italy increase by 823%”.⁵ Headlines like this one, dating back to the first months of 2014, contributed to raising the alarm over a supposed massive migration whose dimensions could alter the social dynamics of Italy and Europe. Not immigration, an invasion! Actually, we should shift from the percentage to the absolute value to get another perception of the phenomenon. In fact, we are talking about 25,650 arrivals over the first four months of the year.

42,925 is the total number of migrants that reached Italy last year⁶ (Frontex reports a slightly lower figure of around 40,000 migrants), 3,818 of whom were unaccompanied minors. The great majority of these migrants arrived through Sicily (37,886) and, in particular, through the island of Lampedusa (14,753). The number of migrant boat landings in 2013 and 2014 seems to be modest if compared to the annual increase of the immigrant population in Italy (334,000 more in 2013 according to the Caritas’ Migrants Report) and they have to be considered within the context of exceptional destabilisation which is affecting entire macro-regions in Africa. The truth that emerges from an analysis of the migration flows in the Mediterranean is that Lampedusa, this little island closer to Africa than to Sicily, is turning out to be an ideal destination and a hub for an increasing number of flows, proved by the fact that the Mare Nostrum rescue operation is intercepting boats before they land.

In addition, while Italy has been suffering from a continuous demographic decline (the number of newborns has fallen for the fifth consecutive year, and in 2013 hit an all time low with only 514,000 newborns) also the number of immigrants entering the country is registering a decrease: 279,000 in 2013

⁵ *Il Giornale*, 15 May 2014

⁶ As stated by Bubbico, Vice Minister of the Interior on February 5 2014, www.interno.it

against 321,000 in 2012 with a negative balance of 42,000. The most affected in 2013 were the arrivals from Romania and China that fell respectively by 25% and 12% compared to previous year.⁷

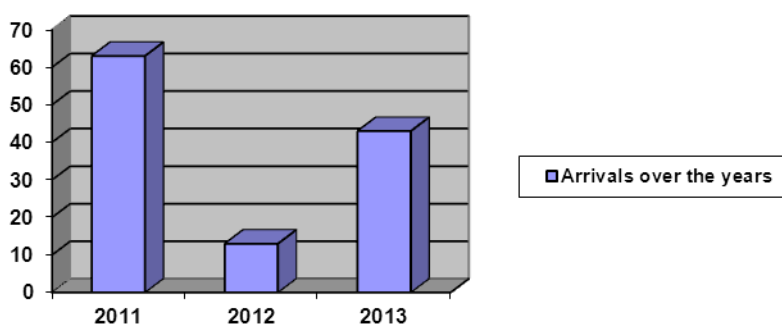
The 2013 arrivals in Italy



Source: Minister of Interior, 2014

Let us look at the routes. According to the Italian Interior Ministry,⁸ Libya is the main departure port for the migrant boats (27,314 migrants), followed by Egypt (9,215) and Turkey (2,077). According to what migrants declared upon landing, they mainly come from Syria (11,307 against just 582 in 2012). Eritrea and Somalia account for the next highest group. In 2013, out of a total of 42,925 landings, 37,258 migrants were rescued at sea, 6,127 of them during 45 interventions within the Mare Nostrum project. Finally, in 2013, the Italian Police captured 200 people, including human traffickers, organisers and accomplices, and confiscated 158 boats.

The arrivals do not follow a stable trend. They are determined by the geopolitical background and they are a significant indicator of the stability or instability of the countries of origin.



Source: Minister of Interior

⁷ Source Istat, <http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/126878> published on June 26th 2014

⁸ <http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.interno.it>

The direct relation between the geopolitical stability index and the size of the migration flows is confirmed by the variations in the countries of origin over the years. In 2012, the top five countries of origin were Tunisia (17.1%), Somalia (16.4%), Afghanistan (13.1%), Eritrea (12.2%) and Pakistan. In 2013, they were Syria (26.3%), Eritrea (22.9%), Somalia (7.6%), Egypt (6.4%) and Nigeria (6.2%). In the first months of 2014, a further variation was recorded on the basis of the provisional available data with Mali ranking first (16%), followed by Gambia (11.3%), Syria (11.6%), Eritrea (11.5%) and Somalia (7.1%). As highlighted by the table below, some data remain stable (Somalia and Eritrea), while there are new arrivals determined by the explosion or worsening of internal conflicts, in addition to the standard migration dynamics (push or pull factors), which require a surplus of humanitarian aid.

The change in migrants' countries of origin

2012	2013	2014 (1st quarter)
Tunisia	Syria	Mali
Somalia	Eritrea	Gambia
Afghanistan	Somalia	Syria
Eritrea	Egypt	Eritrea
Pakistan	Nigeria	Somalia

Source: Italian Ministry of Interior Data processed by the authors of the report

5. "Don't let us call them migrants"

Rather than being caused by underdevelopment, these arrivals are the results of geopolitical factors and a humanitarian emergency affecting several countries located south of the Mediterranean. This is confirmed by the data processed by the ISMU Foundation – Initiatives and Studies on Multi-ethnicity - which were presented in Rome on the occasion of a conference about the MH project. In particular, during the conference Alessio Menonna claimed: "Europe will have to cope with a constant flow of new arrivals every year, about 6 immigrants for every 10,000 inhabitants of the European Union, with strong differences on a country basis. For example, Spain is registering, and is expected to register, 15-16 entries of African citizens every 10,000 inhabitants, while among other Europe's largest countries, France is expected to experience a

decrease from 10 to 9 new arrivals every 10,000 inhabitants. The UK is expected to register an increase from 7 to 8 and Italy will remain stable at 8. Germany is the only one among this group of countries to be registering lower rates - and to be expected to continue to do so. Even if slightly on the increase compared with the past, Germany registers 3 new arrivals from Africa for every 10,000 inhabitants - that is the same demographic sustainability rate as Greece, Ireland and The Netherlands".⁹

Given that we are not facing a huge and unsustainable migration dynamic, the only real and problematic fact is the arrivals: 42,000 in 2013 (slightly over 40,000 according to Frontex) and we have still to see in 2014. And as already pointed out, it is not just about immigrants. Asylum-seekers and refugees are in the majority, therefore they should be considered from another perspective and received according to a different and dedicated regulatory framework.

In that case, too, facts can give us interesting points of analysis. Although geographically more exposed, Italy is not the European country with the heaviest burden when it comes to offering hospitality to this category of migrants. Italy, in fact,

ranks fifth in terms of its number of asylum applications, following Germany, France, Sweden and the UK. Moreover, if we consider the number of asylum-seekers compared to the number of inhabitants, we get to a paradox: The Netherlands and Hungary are dealing with a much higher



number of new arrivals. Among the surveyed countries, Italy also has one of the lowest rates of asylum-seekers compared to the total number of the immigrant population (0.6% against 9.2% in Sweden). Although it ranked third after Hungary and Germany, Italy registered a growth in the number of new arrivals over 2012 equal to the double of the European average. This is the most critical and clearly difficult situation to manage without the support of the Union partners. In fact, it is evident that this high figure does not depend on a heightened attraction capacity of Italy, nor on its softer policies concerning immigration and asylum seekers. On the contrary, these policies are too severe and may prove too unrealistic to cope with processes that are becoming increasingly complex and articulated. The North Africa-Lampedusa route is simply one of the most convenient and lucrative for those who invest in human

⁹ Alessio Menonna, *Le nuove migrazioni dal Nord Africa. Chiavi di lettura e scenari*, speech given at the conference on reception policies and models promoted by the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, Rome, 20 May 2014

trafficking and one of the most feasible for the migrants who desperately escape from persecution, humanitarian catastrophes, civil wars and failed states. While delivering a speech at the Senate, former minister for regional affairs and autonomy Graziano Delrio affirmed that “80% of migrants who arrive in Italy can be considered refugees and not irregular immigrants” (Ansa, 12 June 2014). This is confirmed by Christopher Hein, director of the Italian Refugees Centre (CIR): “The majority of migrants escape from wars and persecutions and they need protection. It is not correct to call them immigrants, as they did not migrate for reasons of work” (CIR, interview in *Redattore Sociale*, 29 April 2014).

Moreover, in the case of Lampedusa, a crucial factor is the media impact: there is no comparison between the coverage received by 43,000 people coming ashore in Lampedusa in 2013 and the little visibility given to 60,000 immigrants (figure for 2012) from Ukraine and Russian Federation who mostly arrived by air.¹⁰ It is clear that these are two different and not comparable phenomena. However, the arrivals by sea are followed with particular sensationalism and alarm by the media and some political parties.

Another prejudice denied by the data is that “the boat emergency” contributes to an increase in the number of irregular immigrants in Italy. As it is an irregular phenomenon there are no hard figures, but we do have figures concerning irregularities which have been detected by the police in Europe. The official data confirms that the number of immigrants found to be irregular in Italy decreased by 22% from 2012 to 2013. The situation seems to be more critical in Germany and Austria, which over the same period registered an increase of irregular immigrants of respectively 20% and 13%. Hungary’s exceptional increase of 774% can be easily explained by the fact that, under pressure from the EU, the country had to change its internal asylum legislation, which was very restrictive and far removed from European standards.¹¹

Top 10 countries for asylum-seekers in 2013

Country	Number of asylum-seekers in 2013	Share in the EU	Increase over 2012	% of numbers of foreigners
Germany	126,990	29.2%	+63.5%	1.6%
France	64,760	14.9%	+5.4%	1.6%
Sweden	54,365	12.5%	+23.7%	8.2%
U.K.	30,110	6.9%	+4.2%	0.6%

¹⁰ Source: Eurostat avia_par dataset, January 2013

¹¹ Frontex –Annual Risk Analysis 2014, <http://frontex.europa.eu>

Italy	27,935	6.4%	+61.1%	0.6%
Belgium	21,225	4.9%	25.0%	1.7%
Hungary	18,895	4.3%	+776.8%	13.4%
Austria	17,520	4.0%	+0.4%	1.8%
The Netherlands	17,160	3.9%	+30.9%	2.4%
Poland	15,150	3.5%	+40.8%	25.7%
EU Total	435,115	100.0%	+29.5%	2.1%

Source: Data Eurostat processed by Fondazione Leone Moressa

IN SUMMARY

- 2013 saw a decrease in the absolute number and the percentage of immigrants in Italy over the total Italian population.
- Recent migration flows from Africa to Italy are determined by economic, political and social destabilisation processes in northern and Sub-Saharan Africa countries.
- These flows have not been stable since, in terms of their origin and size, they have been influenced by the incidental situations of some geopolitical areas.
- The flows towards Lampedusa mainly concern men and women who are entitled to be recognized as refugees or asylum-seekers since they come from areas of conflict and civil wars.
- The data on arrivals - or attempted arrivals - on the coasts of Sicily in 2012 and 2013 do not allow us to sound an alarm about a massive and uncontrolled exodus towards Italy.
- Although we recognise that in 2013 there was a peak of arrivals (more than 40,000), the number of new arrivals over the existing immigrant population in Italy is lower than the European average (0.6% in Italy against 2.1% in Europe).

- The exceptional increase in arrivals in the first four months of 2014 (+823% compared to the same period in 2013) refers to a relatively modest figure of slightly over 25,000 migrants.
- The percentage of asylum-seekers in Italy is significantly lower than the percentage registered in other countries of the Union.

6. The humanitarian catastrophe and the launch of Mare Nostrum project

Keeping records of the migrants reaching the Sicilian coast alive is difficult enough, but calculating the number of those dying at sea during the crossing is impossible. There is no official data to refer to, we can rely only on the estimates made by voluntary associations. Fortress Europe, a blog by the freelance journalist Gabriele Del Grande,¹² provides data based on the figures reported by the international press over the last 26 years. According to this source, from 1988 to date, 19,781 migrants have died on European borders (included land borders) 2,352 of them in 2011 - considered an *annus horribilis* - at least 509 in 2012 and 801 in 2013. In the Strait of Sicily, which is the main route from North Africa to Italy, 7,283 migrants are thought to have died over the same period, with 5,360 people missing. The figures published by the Migrant Files – also reported by Fabrizio Gatti in the magazine *l'Espresso* – are even higher, estimating over 23,000 casualties from 2000 to 2013.¹³ Again according to the Migrant Files, over the same period at least 6,400 died while trying to reach Lampedusa. The number of victims rises to 8,000 when considering all the Strait of Sicily.

The most tragic accident happened on 3 October 2013 when a Libyan boat was shipwrecked near Lampedusa. That death toll was 366 victims. It was a milestone that highlighted the problem and opened a debate on the political and ethical responsibilities of accidents which cannot be attributed only to the trafficker's greed and cynicism.

However, the debate did not lead to any innovation in immigration policy, the way the migration flows were managed nor in the application of the right of asylum. In fact, the matter kept on being regulated by the Bossi-Fini Law approved in 2002. According to this law, sanctions could be imposed on those who rescued irregular migrants at sea. Neither the pressure of the European Parliament to partially modify the

¹² <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/>

¹³ <http://www.detective.io/detective/the-migrants-files>

Bossi-Fini Law nor the intervention of the Constitutional Court of Italy, which had rejected the crime of irregular immigration (one of the key point of the Bossi-Fini Law), was able to change the situation.¹⁴

The only effect of the debate which followed the “disaster of Lampedusa” was the launch of the Mare Nostrum Project on 18 October. This project has a twofold objective: “To protect lives at sea” and “to take to court everyone involved in illegal trafficking in migrants”. As can be read on the institution’s website “the initiative provides for the involvement of the personnel, ships and aircraft of the Italian Navy, the Italian Air Force, Carabinieri, Guardia di Finanza, the Coast Guard, the Red Cross and all governmental organizations that, to some extent, contribute to managing the migration flows by sea”.¹⁵ The cost of the intervention is huge since it involves about one thousand soldiers, aircraft, vessels, helicopters and drones. In 2013, Mario Mauro, at that time Minister of Defence, estimated a spending of EUR 1.5 million per month, but at the beginning of the intervention other estimates indicated a much higher amount, of around EUR 10 million per month¹⁶. As for the operation’s results, government sources report that from October 2013 to June 2014, 39,000 people were rescued.

Molo Favarolo, Lampedusa June 2014



Mare Nostrum consists of patrolling the Strait of Sicily with the objective of detecting and rescuing the boats sailing towards Italy and bringing traffickers and smugglers to justice. Thanks to these operations, the number of

arrivals in Lampedusa has significantly decreased. With a few exceptions, and excluding brief periods, immigrants are sheltered and brought to destinations that allow a more practical and safer transfer to Reception Centres. Moreover, Lampedusa Immigrant Reception Centre has been closed since December 2013 due to the inadequacy of the facilities and the scandal that followed the publication of videos showing improper behaviour by some staff members.

Since its birth, Mare Nostrum has been opposed by the Lega Nord and other Centre-Right movements, which complained about its high costs and lamented that the operation itself could end up in encouraging irregular immigration. On the other hand, the opinion of several associations operating in the migration sector is generally positive, or at least it is not contrary. However, in an increasingly complex world there is

¹⁴ Judgements of the Constitutional Court of Italy which reject the accompaniment to the frontiers and the detention in the act (judgement n. 359 of 13 December, 2010) of the Bossi-Fini law in breach of article (3) and (13) of the Constitution.

¹⁵ www.marina.difesa.it

¹⁶ *Il sole 24 ore*, 15 October, 2013

some negative opinion. For instance, based on what declared by those rescued, some critics denounced that Mare Nostrum staff did not limit their action to rescue operations at sea, but they started identification procedures that should be carried out in another context and more professionally, involving, for example, cultural mediators.¹⁷ “Crazy expenses are exasperating the Lampedusa population, which is already challenged by the poor economy of the Island,” stated a member of Lampedusa association Askavusa (bare foot).¹⁸

In reality, Mare Nostrum limits do not lie within the system itself which, however expensive, have proved efficient and functional in rescuing thousands of people. Its limits are rather to be found in the context of the operation: Frontex, reception policies, Europe.

7. Frontex and EUROSUR

Frontex is an agency established by the European Council in 2004 and it has been operational since 2005. It aims at “managing and operatively cooperating on the external borders of the member states of the European Union.”¹⁹ This agency has several mandates which go from the analysis of the risks caused by the instability in the immigrants’ countries of origin to the training of specialised personnel to carry out border operations. However, the heart of the agency is the promotion of joint initiatives with the member states’ authorities responsible for controls at air, sea and land borders. More practically, Frontex is mainly designed to fight irregular immigration, therefore its personnel is authorised to arrest smugglers and irregular migrants. Rescue activities are not among its duties. Among the first operations of Frontex were Nautilus I, II, III, respectively in 2006, 2007 and 2008, consisting in patrolling the Strait of Sicily to prevent irregular immigration from North Africa. The migrants rescued during those operations were generally brought to Lampedusa. Frontex cooperates with Eurosur, the land and sea borders surveillance system established by the European Union in 2013 to reinforce its efficacy.

In the attempt to put pressure on the European Union to obtain more support for Italy in the management of new arrivals from Africa, Italian Minister Alfano denounced the scarcity of Frontex's resources - a budget of EUR 80 million per year - that compromises the effectiveness of the body: “We spend EUR 9 million per month for the Mare Nostrum project,” stated the Minister. “This means that Frontex's total budget to patrol all the European borders corresponds to nine months of the Mare Nostrum operation. Therefore, Frontex as it is cannot work” (Adkronos, 14 June 2014).

¹⁷ Fulvio Vassallo Paleologo, Mare Nostrum. Luci ed ombre sulle modalità operative, www.meltingpot.org, 26 October 2013

¹⁸ Lampedusa: L'altra faccia dell'operazione Mare Nostrum , in www.osservatorioiraq.it

¹⁹ <http://frontex.europa.eu>

In addressing Italy's requests, the European Council on June 26 and 27 was disappointing because, apart from some obvious appeals for an integrated approach in the management of Mediterranean migration flows, it did not lead to any definite or binding commitments. The European Council²⁰ conclusions acknowledged that "the Union's commitment to international protection requires a strong European asylum policy" (§7), and that "addressing the root causes of irregular migration flows is an essential part of European migration policy" (§8). Furthermore, Frontex "should reinforce its operational assistance, in particular to support Member States facing strong pressure at the external borders" (§9). However, the use of 'should' and the absence of precise commitments on Europe's part indicate a substantial failure of the Italian diplomatic intervention, which was aimed to obtain concrete involvement.



Molo Favarolo, Lampedusa June 2014

Italy is substantially alone to face the management of new Mediterranean migration flows, while inactive European institutions, which were recently denounced by Human Rights Watch for financing centres for immigrants in Libya where torture is practised on a regular basis. However, although Mare Nostrum has proved its efficacy in containing the death toll at sea (while it was sustainable and financed), the operation seems to be much more fragile and inadequate in providing a reception system.

8. A proposal. Humanitarian corridors

The evidence of continuous tragedies at sea of migrants trying to reach Italy through the Mediterranean shows that no system - neither Frontex, EUROSUR nor Mare Nostrum - can rescue those entrusting their lives to traffickers or whatever makeshift means. Accidents and tragedies caused by overcrowded boats, which collapse or cannot reach their destination, are commonplace. Hence, a wide group of humanitarian associations and several agencies – including Italian trade union CGIL, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Italian Council for Refugees (CIR) and the FCEI itself- have made a proposal to open humanitarian corridors to allow migrants who have the prerequisites for refugee status to obtain a European visa. This is well explained by Christopher Hein (CIR). Asylum-seekers "should be able to

²⁰ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/it/ec/143494.pdf

²¹ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/22/libya-whipped-beaten-and-hung-trees>

go to European diplomatic missions based in Tripoli and Cairo to communicate their condition. When they have the right - that means when they are in the conditions defined by the law - they should obtain a visa for humanitarian reasons or international obligations. I am talking about something that has been already provided by the Schengen agreement and rarely put into practice".²² Senator Luigi Manconi, president of the Extraordinary Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights agrees with this proposal, and believes that "the issues of [new migration flows in Mediterranean] should follow new patterns such as courtesy visas that the Consulates in countries like Libya or Egypt could provide".²³

Proposals like these are against the logic of the EU Dublin Regulation (Regulation 2003/343/CE), according to which only one member state is competent to recognise refugee status, that in which the asylum application is first submitted. This mechanism, that Italy has not been able to modify, determines the fact that the management of the procedures to recognise the asylum-seekers who have reached Italy falls to Italy alone, although the persons concerned are interested in onward migration to another European country. Thus, a different interpretation of EU law should overcome this constraint, and acknowledge the right of refugees to follow their own itinerary within the common European area.

9. A plea to the churches of Europe

One of the MH's objectives is to develop the relations with European Protestant churches to make them aware of the new migration flows in the Mediterranean area, which aim for Italy and in particular towards Sicily and the island of Lampedusa. Starting from the MH Observatory , we appeal to our sister churches to put pressure on their governments to make them adopt measures of solidarity and sharing with the Mediterranean countries that are more exposed to the arrivals.

The MH project detects and denounces the limits of the reception system set up by the Italian government. However, at the same time it supports the request of a more conscious European commitment regarding the fact that Sicily and Lampedusa are at the borders of Europe and that all the countries of the European Union are to be made aware of the change and the humanitarian features of the migration flows now occurring in the Mediterranean.

²² interview by M. Bellu, *Repubblica* 13 May 2014

²³ Asca, 15 October 2013 Moreover, Manconi edited the volume *Accogliamoli tutti* together with Valentina Brinis, Il Saggiatore 2013.

The MH project encourages the sister churches to visit the migration reception centres in Italy. In addition, it is possible to send volunteers for short periods of time based on the needs of each centre.



In brief, one of the MH's project objectives is to provide the partner churches in Europe with tools that are useful to their initiatives and campaigns to support an effective European commitment to protecting and recognising the rights of persons intending to seek asylum after crossing the Mediterranean.

10. Immigration policies: A contradictory system

This system includes several types of centre:²⁴

1. Centres for First Aid and Reception (CPSA). These were originally established in the places where the arrivals were more frequent. They provide reception facilities, initial medical care and perform migrant identification. The stay in these structures should be very short, because these centres – like the one operating in Lampedusa until December 2013 - cannot provide other services.
2. Reception Centres (CDA) and Reception Centres for Asylum-Seekers (CARA) are intended to guarantee a first reception service for irregular immigrants found on the Italian territory. They are meant for short stays, the time necessary to establish the person's identity and assess the right to remain or to arrange removal. The centres of Caltanissetta, Catania and Trapani belong to this category.



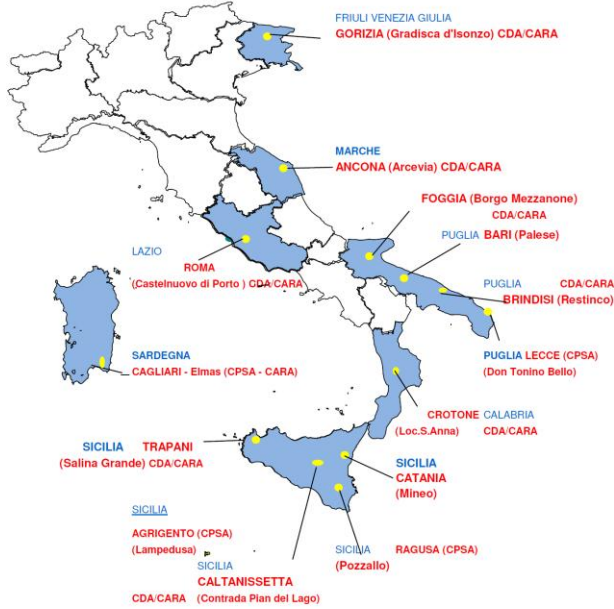
²⁴ <http://www.interno.gov.it>

3. The Identification and Expulsion Centres (CIE), unlike CPSA, CDA and CARA, are intended for “detention” – this is the term used by the Interior Ministry – of non-EU foreigners who have immigrated irregularly and await expulsion with the approval of the Justice of the Peace. In Sicily, there are two CIEs, in Caltanissetta and Trapani. The establishment and the management of the CIEs - governed by the law no. 286/1998 “Turco/Napolitano” and implemented by the “Bossi-Fini” law in 2002 - have always been controversial. In 2007, on Giuliano Amato's initiatives as Interior Minister, a special commission was established chaired by ambassador Staffan De Mistura. The commission highlighted the ineffectiveness of administrative detention which “does not address the complex issues concerning migration”, not to mention the high costs and the great inconveniences that it involved. Thus, the Commission proposed to go beyond the CEI centres “by emptying them of all the categories of migrants for whom detention was not required”. Actually, the situation headed in precisely the opposite direction. In 2008, the Berlusconi government extended the maximum period of stay in the CIE from 60 to 180 days. Then, in 2011, a further extension was established by the then Interior Minister, Roberto Maroni, who extended the detention to 18 months. A 2013 report by the NGO Doctors for Human Rights (MEDU) concluded that “the assessment of eleven CIE centres (for some it was not impossible to collect the data proving the reclusive nature of these structures) revealed conditions for the migrants detained.” Hence the proposal to close all the CIEs and adopt measures which provide for the detention of irregular foreigners as an exception.²⁵

Molo Favarolo, Lampedusa June 2014

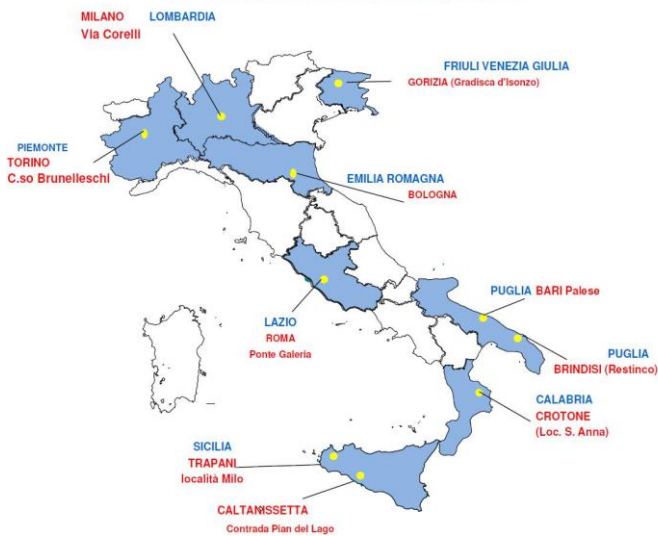
²⁵ <http://www.mediciperidiritiumani.org/pdf/ARCIP>

DIPARTIMENTO PER LE LIBERTA' CIVILI E L'IMMIGRAZIONE - Direzione Centrale Servizi civili per l'Immigrazione e l'Asilo
CENTRI DI PRIMO SOCCORSO E ACCOGLIENZA - CENTRI DI ACCOGLIENZA - CENTRI DI ACCOGLIENZA PER
RICHIEDENTE ASILO (CPSA - CDA - CARA)



DIPARTIMENTO PER LE LIBERTA' CIVILI E L'IMMIGRAZIONE - Direzione Centrale Servizi civili per l'Immigrazione e l'Asilo

CENTRI DI IDENTIFICAZIONE ED ESPULSIONE (CIE)



None of the measures mentioned above is able to respond to the need for inclusion, orientation and stability of asylum-seekers. Thus, starting from 2012, Law no. 189 established a different system, managed by the Interior Minister in collaboration with The National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): the System of Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR), which was exceptionally run in parallel with the CIEs.

4. The System of Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR). SPRAR's philosophy is focused on the activation of resources and facilities made available by the Italian municipalities to offer support to asylum-seekers. Going beyond the detention concept of the CEI centres, the SPRAR centres are spread across the Italian territory. They have medium-size dimensions to avoid problems related to big concentrations of asylum-seekers and they are managed by associations which are selected under a public tendering process. As stated on the official sources of the Interior Minister, "With the aim of assisting any individuals received along a pathway to (re)gaining their independence, SPAR local projects complement integrated reception through a series of activities aiming to socio-economic inclusion of the individuals."²⁶. Thus SPRAR gives value to the social resource of the experience and the commitment of hundreds of associations that have been involved into this specific sector of activities for years.
5. The Centres for Exceptional Reception (CAS)²⁷ were established in 2014 by an autonomous initiative of the Interior Minister. These centres fulfil similar functions to the SPRARs, but their organization is more extemporary and less transparent since each local Prefecture subcontracts reception services to third parties, often through the lowest bid auction criterion. Beyond affecting the centrality of the SPRAR system, the CAS centres ended up providing lower quality services not appropriate to managing the new flows of migrants.

Given the sometime spontaneous nature of the CAS centres, to date there is no accurate mapping of their presence in Italy.

11. The activities of Protestant churches in Italy

Italian Protestant churches have been involved for decades in activities for immigrants – sometimes independently but more often by coordinating with each other. In particular, the Synod Commission for

²⁶ <http://www.serviziocentrale.it>

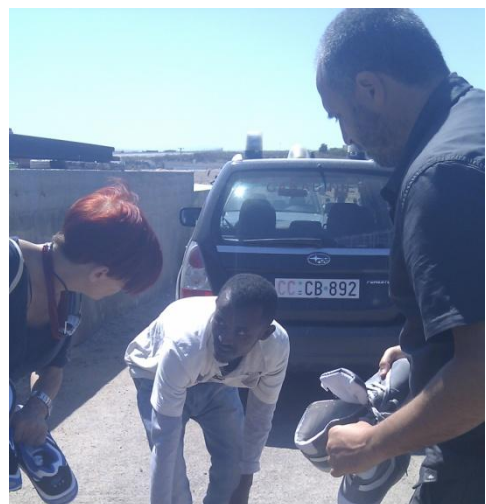
²⁷ Cf. circular letter of March 20th 2014 "Afflussi di cittadini stranieri a seguito di ulteriori sbarchi sulle coste italiane", <http://siciliamigranti.blogspot.it/2014/04/la-perenne-emergenza-i-centri-d.html>

Diaconal Ministry (CSD) - which could be defined as the social arm of the Methodist and Waldesian Churches won some contracts for SPRAR services and it manages reception centres in Palermo, Torino, Vittoria (RG) and Torre Pellice (TO).

The FCEI, too, has been involved for decades in several programmes for the reception and the support of migrants and asylum-seekers. They are mentioned in the decisions of several national meetings, the most recent of which, in 2012, states: “We would all benefit from an immigration policy properly addressing those who are knocking on our doors because they are forced to do so by situations of extreme difficulties affecting countries in the Global South. We are aware of the complexity of this issues and the need for appropriate solutions within a European framework. However, we are deeply convinced that our well-being cannot be bought by the suffering of others and that it is our duty to define an immigration policy and to acknowledge the rights of the immigrants living among us. We do this on the grounds of our faith, but also for reasons including stability and, safety policies, and the cooperation and sharing of resources between rich and poor countries.”²⁸

The FCEI has been active in this field since 1984, when it opened its Refugee and Migrant Service (SRM). Its aim was to “inform churches and the whole of society about immigration, asylum, racism, discrimination and interculturalism, in order to defend the rights of migrants and refugees and to support them in the process of social and cultural inclusion in Italy”. In this context, the Service is part of national and international networks that advocate for the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers and lobby to improve the relevant laws. It provides advice and support for immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers who are either in transit or living more permanently in Italy.

Giving the increasing number of Protestant immigrants, in 2000 the FCEI launched a specific programme called Being Church Together (*Essere chiesa insieme*, ECI) with the development of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Protestant congregations as its main objective. ECI has also developed several programmes for intercultural training, and commissioned research on the religious and cultural dynamics specific to Protestant immigration.²⁹



*Mediterranean Hope project staff,
Molo Favarolo, Lampedusa May 2014*



²⁸ Summary of the 16th assembly of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy

²⁹ Cf. Sorelle e fratelli of Jerry Masslo. *L'immigrazione evangelica in Italia*, Claudiana, 2014

The FCEI also participates in the work of the Commission of Churches on Migrants in Europe (CCME), an ecumenical organisation based in Brussels which coordinates relations with the European institutions in order to support migrants and refugees.

In 2011, a programme for the reception of refugees from the “North Africa Emergency” was of great importance for the FCEI and some local churches.³⁰ The initiative, launched and supported by the Tavola Valdese and adopted by the FCEI, allowed about fifty people to be received and hosted in churches and facilities of the Protestant churches of Italy for some months.

This experience allowed the FCEI to test a new action plan, created with the support of a network of hosting structures which involved about ten locations on a national basis. A report contains several documents referring to that experience, included a conference at the Methodist centre Ecumene which saw the participation of the prefect Riccardo Compagnucci, who is head of the Office for Civil Liberties and Immigration, and several experts.³¹

At the end of the 2013, The Waldensian Church Executive (*Tavola Valdese*) asked the FCEI to define a new project for immigration based on its past experience and its competences. In December 2013, the project named Mediterranean Hope was launched. It is a three-year plan and it is financed with the support of “8 x mille” (eight per mille of income tax revenue) assigned to the Methodist and Waldensian Churches.

12. Mediterranean Hope's first achievements

After the initial phase, discussed and approved by the Council and the General Committee of the FCEI, there were field tests and then the first activities. In brief, the first months of the projects saw the implementation of the following activities:

- **The establishment and the launch of an Observatory in Lampedusa.**

Although there are no significant arrivals in Lampedusa at the moment, the island remains a strategic destination to understand the nature of the new migration flows in the Mediterranean area. In this perspective, the Observatory has:

a. constantly liaised with the municipality, the institutions responsible for rescue operations and the local voluntary groups;

³⁰ For an analysis, cfr. Accoglienza e/è testimonianza. Interview with Pina Grosso, NEV 17 October 2012

³¹ For the electronic format of the report, please contact fcei@fcei.it

- b. produced information and commentaries, both in Italian and in English, on a regular basis and from a very sensitive and iconic location. These documents have been spread through Protestant websites,³² social media,³³ two blogs (on the websites of the dailies *L'Unità* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano*³⁴) and some radio stations;
- c. collaborated with local authorities and associations for the first aid operations during the landings;
- d. taken part in the organisation of some initiatives promoted by the 3 October Committee (the day in 2013 on which 366 immigrants lost their lives in a shipwreck close to the island of Lampedusa). The Observatory is also directly involved in organising the commemorations planned on 3 October 2014;
- e. hosted Italian and International volunteers and experts who were interested in collaborating with the project;
- f. provided a media centre for Italian and international journalists and social operators who are interested in collecting information and testimonies on migration dynamics in the Mediterranean area;
- g. started a collaboration with Radio Delta Lampedusa for a future cultural exchange with Radio Beckwith Evangelica, based in Torre Pellice (TO);
- h. taken part in meetings, conferences, events organised by churches and secular associations involved in migration issues;
- i. started research on the social needs of Lampedusa. The objective is to go beyond the polarisation between action on behalf of the immigrants and support to the Island whose inhabitants have to cope with serious problems (such as the cost of living increase, the high costs and scarcity of connections, the lack of quality health structures....). A discussion on these issues has been already launched with the municipality and the voluntary networks of the island.

- **Preliminary activities to open a reception centre in Scicli (RG).**

In particular, a search for suitable facilities to carry out the activities of reception, training, orientation as well as the activities to inform the local citizens. In this preliminary phase the MH project has:

- a. started to collect furniture, tools and clothing for the reception centre at Scicli;

³² www.nev.it

³³ <https://it-it.facebook.com/pages/Mediterranean-hope/252231521632595>

³⁴ <http://mediterranean-hope.comunita.unita.it/>; <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/tag/lampedusa/>

b. organised public events in Scicli to inform the local institutions and population about the Mediterranean migration flows;

c. taken part in church meetings and other events to present the activities to be launched in the near future.

- **Activities on a national basis.**

The FCEI held a conference on reception policies and models in Rome on 20 May 2014 in order to present the MH project.

Moreover, the FCEI has liaised with the Italian and international Protestant churches to involve them in the project and has made institutional contacts to present ongoing and future activities.

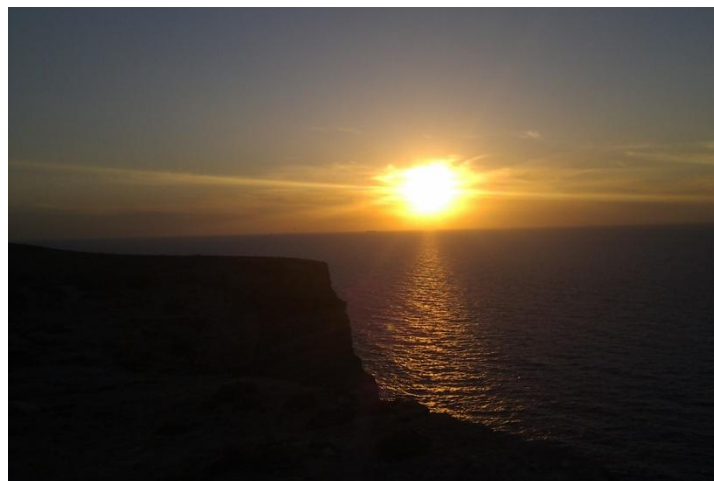
12. No conclusion, just a starting point

An essential element of the MH project is the spontaneous spirit with which the churches and the Protestants in Sicily are invited to collaborate. Hence the great importance given to local, national and international volunteers.

This report is a tool for the - hopefully - many people who will collaborate with the Mediterranean Hope project. In these pages, we have tried to describe the general framework in which the project was born and in which it is taking its first steps. Some of the planned activities have been already implemented and we think that they have already produced results: for example, the constant flow of news from Lampedusa and the local activities of the MH project staff, which is by now well integrated and collaborating with local institutions and associations in Sicily. The opening of a reception centre will take longer but a network of interest and support for the project has already been activated.

We do not want to use any closing words. We just want to relaunch an appeal to you to consider this project a new adventure of testimony to the gospel in the context of the Mediterranean – a sea that we wish to contemplate not with fear but with renewed belief and hope.

Sunset at Lampedusa



This report was realised with contributions from Paolo Naso, Marta Bernardini, Francesco Piobbichi, Franca Di Lecce and Giulia Dori.

Photos by Marta Bernardini and Francesco Piobbichi.

Graphics by Beniamino Garrone.