

Managing Maritime Security in the Mediterranean Sea: The Roles of the EU in Tackling Irregular Migration

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Abstract : The Mediterranean Sea, at the crossroads of three continents has always been the focus of pan-European and worldwide attention. Over the past decade, the Mediterranean Sea has become a hotbed for irregular migration particularly from the African continent toward the Europe. Among the major transit routes in the Mediterranean Sea include the Strait of Gibraltar, Canary Island and island of Lampedusa. In recent years, Mediterranean Sea has witnessed significant numbers of accidents and shipwrecks involving the irregular migrants and refugees trying to reach Europe via the sea. The shipwrecks and traffickers exploitation of migrants draw most of the attention particularly for the European Union (EU). This incident has been a wakeup call for the EU and become the top political agenda in the EU policy to tackle irregular migration and human smuggling at sea. EU has repeatedly addressed irregular migration as one of the threats the EU and its citizens may be confronted with and therefore immediate measures are crucial to tackle the crisis. In light of this, various initiatives have been adopted by the EU to strengthen external border control and restrict access to irregular migrants, notably through the enforcement of Frontex and Eunavfor Med. This paper analyses current development of counter-migration operations by the EU in response to migration crisis in the Mediterranean Sea. The analysis is threefold. First, this study examines the patterns and trends of irregular migration's movements from recent perspective. Second, this study concentrates on the evolution of the EU operations that are in place in the Mediterranean Sea, notably by Frontex and Eunavfor Med to curb the influx of irregular migrants to the European countries, including, among others, Greece and Italy. Third, this study investigates the EU approaches to fight against the proliferation of human trafficking networks at sea. This study is essential to determine the roles of the EU in tackling migration crisis and human trafficking in the Mediterranean Sea and the effectiveness of their counter-migration operations to reduce the number of irregular migrants travelling via the sea. Elite interviews and document analysis were used as a methodology in this study. The study discovers that the EU operations have successfully contributed to reduce the numbers of irregular migrant's arrival to Europe. The study also shows that the operations were effective to disrupt smugglers business models particularly from Libya. This study provides essential understanding about the roles of the EU not limited to tackle the migration crisis and disrupt trafficking networks, but also pledged to prevent further loss of lives at sea.

Keywords : European union, frontex, irregular migration, Mediterranean sea

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