Part IV
State Practice
Migration Control at Sea: The Italian Case

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1. Introduction

Migration pressure has increased over the last years and it is expected to intensify in the coming decades. From the 1980s onwards, the level of international migration has risen by more than 60% and around 175 million people are today likely to be migrants from their own countries.\(^1\) Out of 456 million inhabitants living in the European Union in 2004, it is estimated that some 34–37 million were international migrants.\(^2\) By comparison with these figures, the number of irregular migrants that arrived to the coasts of Italy, Spain, Greece and Malta in the same year amounted to approximately 30–40,000 people.\(^3\) Although the figures may vary from year to year, and this estimate takes into account only persons intercepted when they reach the European countries concerned (without considering the high number of people who die during their perilous journey, in the desert or across the Mediterranean Sea) it shows that clandestine migration by sea in the Mediterranean area represents only a small part of a rather significant phenomenon.

Despite its minor influence on overall migration flows to Europe, there is growing concern in Europe over irregular migration across the Mediterranean.

\(^3\) In 2007, the number of illegal migrants intercepted at sea was reported as follows: 20,445 in Italy, 11,751 in Spain, 17,502 in Malta: *Frontex General Report 2007*. As pointed out by Paolo Cutitta, “Il controllo dell’immigrazione tra Nordafrica e Italia” in *Libro Bianco: I Centri di Permanenza e Assistenza Temporanea in Italia*, ed. Nicoletta Dentico and Maurizio Gressi (Rome: Comitato Diritti Umani, 2004), these data are to be considered incomplete since they do not take into account, among others, a) migrants who have been able to elude controls, settling on the Italian territory or continuing their travel to another European country; b) migrants who have died crossing the Mediterranean. In addition, there are many other people wishing to reach European countries but who are unable to travel for several reasons. The ICMPD estimates that between 100,000 and 120,000 would-be migrants try to cross the Mediterranean each year. See International Centre for Migration Policy Development, *Irregular Transit Migration in the Mediterranean – Some facts, futures and insights* (Vienna, 2004).